THE STREET CALLED STRAIGHT

BASIL KING

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A Selection only.

THE STREET CALLED STRAIGHT

BY

BASIL KING

AUTHOR OF

"THE INNER SHRINE"

"BY THE STREET CALLED STRAIGHT WE COME TO THE HOUSE CALLED BEAUTIFUL"

NEW ENGLAND SAYING

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THE STREET CALLED STRAIGHT

I

AS a matter of fact, Davenant was under no illusions concerning the quality of the welcome his hostess was according him, though he found a certain pleasure in being once more in her company. It was not a keen pleasure, but neither was it an embarrassing one; it was exactly what he supposed it would be in case they ever met again—a blending on his part of curiosity, admiration, and reminiscent suffering out of which time and experience had taken the sting. He retained the memory of a minute of intense astonishment once upon a time, followed by some weeks, some months perhaps, of angry humiliation; but the years between twenty-four and thirty-three are long and varied, generating in healthy natures plenty of saving common sense. Work, travel, and a widened knowledge of men and manners had so ripened Davenant's mind that he was able to see his proposal now as Miss Guion must have seen it then, as something so incongruous and absurd as not only to need no consideration, but to call for no reply. Nevertheless, it was the refusal on her part of a reply, of the mere laconic No which was all that, in his heart of hearts, he had ever expected, that rankled in him longest; but even that mortification had passed, as far as he knew, into the limbo of extinct regrets.

For her present superb air of having no recollection

of his blunder he had nothing but commendation. It was as becoming to the spirited grace of its wearer as a royal mantle to a queen. Carrying it as she did, with an easy, preoccupied affability that enabled her to look round him and over him and through him, to greet him and converse with him, without seeming positively to take in the fact of his existence, he was permitted to suppose the incident of their previous acquaintance, once so vital to himself, to have been forgotten. If this were so, it would be nothing very strange, since a woman of twenty-seven, who has had much social experience, may be permitted to lose sight of the more negligible of the conquests she has made as a girl of eighteen. She had asked him to dinner, and placed him honourably at her right; but words could not have made it plainer than it was that he was but an accident to the occasion.

He was there, in short, because he was staying with Mr. and Mrs. Temple. After a two years' absence from New England he had arrived in Waverton that day. "Oh, bother! bring him along," had been the formula in which Miss Guion had conveyed his invitation, the dinner being but an informal neighbourly affair. Two or three wedding gifts having arrived from various quarters of the world, it was natural that Miss Guion should want to show them confidentially to her dear friend and distant relative, Drusilla Fane. Mrs. Fane had every right to this privileged inspection, since she had not only timed her yearly visit to her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Temple, so that it should synchronize with the wedding, but had introduced Olivia to Colonel Ashley, in the first place. Indeed, there had been a rumour at Southsea, right up to the time of Miss Guion's visit to the pretty little house on the Marine Parade, that the colonel's calls and attentions there had been not unconnected with Mrs. Fane herself; but rumour in British naval and military stations is notoriously over-active, especially in matters of the heart. Certain it is, however, that when the fashionable London papers announced

that a marriage had been arranged, and would shortly take place, between Lieutenant-Colonel Rupert Ashley, of the Sussex Rifles, and of Heneage Place, Belvoir, Leicestershire, and Olivia Margaret, only child of Henry Guion, Esquire, of Tory Hill, Waverton, near Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A., no one offered warmer congratulations than the lady in whose house the interesting pair had met. There were people who ascribed this attitude to the fact that, being constitutionally "game," she refused to betray her disappointment She had been "awfully game," they said, when poor Gerald Fane, also of the Sussex Rifles, was cut off with enteric at Peshawur. But the general opinion was to the effect that, not wanting Rupert Ashley (for some obscure feminine reason) for herself, she had magnanimously bestowed him elsewhere. Around tea-tables, and at church-parades, it was said, "Americans do that," with some comment on the methods of the transfer.

On every ground, then, Drusilla was entitled to this first look at the presents, some of which had come from Ashley's brother-officers, who were consequently brother-officers of the late Captain Fane; so that when she telephoned saying she was afraid that they, her parents and herself, couldn't come to dinner that evening, because a former ward of her father's—Olivia must remember Peter Davenant!—was arriving to stay with them for a week or two, Miss Guion had answered, "Oh, bother! bring him along," and the matter was arranged. It was doubtful, however, that she knew him in advance to be the Peter Davenant who, nine years earlier, had had the presumption to fall in love with her; it was still more doubtful, after she had actually shaken hands with him and called him by name, whether she paid him the tribute of any kind of recollection. The fact that she had seated him at her right, in the place that would naturally be accorded to Rodney Temple, the scholarly director of the Department of Ceramics in the Harvard Gallery of Fine Arts, made it look as if she considered Davenant a

total stranger. In the few conventionally gracious words she addressed to him, her manner was that of the hostess who receives a good many people in the course of a year towards the chance guest she had never seen before and expects never to see again.

"Twice round the world since you were last in Boston? How interesting!" Then, as if she had said enough for courtesy, she continued across the lights and flowers to Mrs. Fane: "Drusilla, did you know Colonel Ashley had declined that post at Gibraltar? I'm so glad. I should hate the Gib."

"The Gib wouldn't hate you," Mrs. Fane assured her. "You'd have a heavenly time there. Rupert Ashley is deep in the graces of old Bannockburn, who's in command. He's not a bad old sort, old Ban isn't, though he's a bit of a martinet. Lady Ban is awful—a bounder in petticoats. She looks like that."

Drusilla pulled down the corners of a large, mobile mouth, so as to simulate Lady Bannockburn's expression, in a way that drew a laugh from every one at the table but the host. Henry Guion remained serious, not from natural gravity, but from inattention. He was obviously not in a mood for joking, nor apparently for eating, since he had scarcely tasted his soup and was now only playing with the fish. As this corroborated what Mrs Temple had more than once asserted to her husband during the past few weeks, that "Henry Guion had something on his mind," she endeavoured to exchange a glance with him, but he was too frankly enjoying the exercise of his daughter's mimetic gift to be otherwise observant.

"And what does Colonel Ashley look like, Drucie?" he asked, glancing slyly at Miss Guion.

"Like that," Mrs. Fane said instantly. Straightening the corners of her mouth and squaring her shoulders, she fixed her eyes into a stare of severity, and stroked horizontally an imaginary moustache, keeping the play up till her lips quivered.

"It *is* like him," Miss Guion laughed.

"Is he as stiff as all that?" the professor inquired.

"Not stiff," Miss Guion explained, "only dignified."

"Dignified!" Drusilla cried. "I should think so. He's just like Olivia herself. It's perfectly absurd that those two should marry. Apart, they're a pair of splendid specimens; united, they'll be too much of a good thing. They're both so well supplied with the same set of virtues that when they look at each other it'll be like seeing their own faces in a convex mirror. It'll be simply awful."

Her voice had the luscious English intonation, in spite of its being pitched a little too high. In speaking she displayed the superior, initiated manner apt to belong to women who bring the flavour of England into colonial and Indian garrison towns—a manner Drusilla had acquired notably well, considering that not ten years previous her life had been bounded by American college class-days. Something of this latter fact persisted, notwithstanding her English articulation and style of doing her hair. Her marriage had been the accident of a winter spent with her mother in Bermuda, at a time when the Sussex Rifles were stationed there. Her engagement to Captain Gerald Fane—son of the Very Reverend the Dean of Silchester—was the result of a series of dances given chiefly in the Hamilton hotels. Marriage brought the girl born and bred in a New England college town into a kind of life for which she had had no preparation; but she adapted herself as readily as she would have done had she married a Russian prince or a Spanish grandee. In the effort she made there was a mingling of the matter-of-fact and the *tour de force*. Regimental life is not unlike that of a large family; it has the same sort of claims, intimacies, and quarrels, the same sort of jealousies within, combined with solidarity against the outsider. Perceiving this quickly, Drusilla proceeded to disarm criticism by being impeccable in dress and negatively

amiable in conduct. "With my temperament," she said to herself, "I can afford to wait." Following her husband to Barbados, the Cape, and India, she had just succeeded in passing all the tests of the troop-ship and the married quarters when he died. For a while her parents hoped she would make her widowed home in Boston; but her heart had been given irrevocably to the British Army—to its distinguished correctness, to its sober glories, its world-wide roving, and its picturesque personal associations. Though she had seen little of England, except for occasional visits on leave, she had become English in tastes and at heart. For a year after Gerald's death she lived with his family at Silchester, in preference to going to her own. After that she settled in the small house at Southsea, where from time to time she had her girlhood's companion, Olivia Guion, as a guest.

"Perhaps that'll do us good," Miss Guion ventured, in reply to Drusilla's observations at her expense. "To see ourselves as others see us must be much like looking at one's face in a spoon."

"That doesn't do us any good," Rodney Temple corrected, "because we always blame the spoon."

"Don't you mind them, dear," Mrs. Temple cooed. She was a little, appled-faced woman, with a figure suggestive of a tea-cosy, and a voice with a gurgle in it, like a dove's. A nervous, convulsive movement of her pursed-up little mouth made that organ an uncertain element in her physiognomy, shifting as it did from one side of her face to the other with the rapidity of an aurora borealis. "Don't mind them, dear. A woman can never do more than reflect 'broken lights' of her husband, when she has a good one. Don't you love that expression—'broken lights?' 'We are but broken lights of Thee!' Dear Tennyson! And no word yet from Madame de Melcourt."

"I don't expect any now," Olivia explained. "If Aunt Vic had meant to write she would have done it

long ago. I'm afraid I've offended her past forgiveness."

She held her head slightly to one side, smiling with an air of mock penitence.

"Dear, dear!" Mrs. Temple murmured sympathetically. "Just because you wouldn't marry a Frenchman."

"And a little because I'm *going* to marry an Englishman. To Aunt Vic all Englishmen are grocers."

"Horrid old thing!" Drusilla said indignantly.

"It's because she doesn't know them, of course," Olivia went on. "It's one of the things I never can understand—how people can generalize about a whole nation because they happen to dislike one or two individuals. As a matter of fact, Aunt Vic has become so absorbed in her little circle of old French royalist *noblesse* that she can't see anything to admire outside the rue de l'Université and the château life in Normandy. She does admit that there's an element of homespun virtue in the old families of Boston and Waverton; but that's only because she belongs to them herself."

"The capacity of the American woman for being domesticated in an alien environment," observed Rodney Temple, "is only equalled by the dog's."

"We're nomadic, father," Drusilla asserted, "and migratory. We've always been so. It's because we're Saxons and Angles, and Celts and Normans, and——

"'Saxon and Norman and Dane are we,'" Mrs. Temple quoted gently.

"They've always been fidgeting about the world from one country to another," Drusilla continued, "and we've inherited the taste. If we hadn't, our ancestors would never have crossed the Atlantic in the first place. And now that we've got here and can't go any farther in this direction, we're on the jump to get back again. That's all there is to it. It's just in the blood. Isn't it, Peter? Isn't it, Cousin Henry?"

Drusilla had a way of appealing to whatever men

were present, as though her statements lacked something till they had received masculine corroboration.

"All the same, I wish you could have managed the thing without giving offence to Aunt Vic."

The words were Henry Guion's first since sitting down to table.

"I couldn't help it, papa. I didn't *give* Aunt Vic offence; she took it."

"She's always been so fond of you——"

"I'm fond of *her*. She's an old darling. And yet I couldn't let her marry me off to a Frenchman, in the French way, when I'd made up my mind to—to do something else. Could I, Cousin Cherry?"

Mrs. Temple plumed herself, pleased at being appealed to. "I don't see how you could, dear. But I suppose your dear aunt—great-aunt, that is—has become so foreign, that she's forgotten our simple ways. So long as you follow your heart, dear——"

"I've done that, Cousin Cherry."

The tone drew Davenant's eyes to her again, not in scrutiny, but for the pleasure it gave him to see her delicate features suffused with a glow of unexpected softness. It was unexpected, because her bearing had always conveyed to him, even in the days when he was in love with her, an impression of very refined, very subtle haughtiness. It seemed to make her say, like Marie Antoinette to Madame Vigée Lebrun: "They would call me arrogant if I were not a queen." The assumption of privilege and prerogative might be only the inborn consciousness of distinction, but he fancied it might be more effective for being tempered. Not that it was overdone. It was not *done* at all. If the inner impulse working outward poised a neat, classic head too loftily, or shot from grey eyes, limpid and lovely in themselves, a regard that was occasionally too imperious, Olivia Guion was probably unaware of these effects. With beauty by inheritance, refinement by association, and taste and "finish" by instinct,

it was possible for her to engage with life relatively free from the cumbrous impedimenta of self-consciousness. It was because Davenant was able to allow for this that his judgment on her pride of manner, exquisite though it was, had never been more severe; none the less, it threw a new light on his otherwise slight knowledge of her character to note the faint blush, the touch of gentleness, with which she hinted her love for her future husband. He had scarcely believed her capable of this kind of condescension.

He called it condescension because he saw, or thought he saw, in her approaching marriage, not so much the capture of her heart as the fulfilment of her ambitions. He admitted that, in her case, there was a degree to which the latter would imply the former, since she was the sort of woman who would give her love in the direction in which her nature found its fitting outlet. He judged something from what Drusilla Fane had said, as they were driving toward Tory Hill that evening.

"Olivia simply *must* marry a man who'll give her something to do besides sitting round and looking handsome. With Rupert Ashley she'll have the duties of a public, or semi-public, position. He'll keep her busy, if it's only opening bazaars and presenting prizes at Bisley. The American men who've tried to marry her have wanted to be her servants, when all the while she's been waiting for a master."

Davenant understood that, now that it was pointed out to him, though the thought would not have come to him spontaneously. She was the strong woman who would yield only to a stronger man. Colonel Ashley might not be stronger than she in intellect or character, but he had done some large things on a large field, and was counted an active force in a country of forceful activities. There might be a question as to whether he would prove to be her master, but he would certainly never think of being her slave

"What are *you* going to do, Henry, when the gallant stranger carries off Olivia, a fortnight hence?"

Though she asked the question with the good intention of drawing her host into the conversation, Mrs. Temple made it a point to notice the effort with which he rallied himself to meet her words.

"What am I going to do?" he repeated absently. "Oh, my future will depend very much on—Hobson's choice."

"That's true," Miss Guion agreed hurriedly, as though to emphasize a point. "It's all the choice I've left to him. I've arranged everything for papa—beautifully. He's to take in a partner—perhaps two partners. You know," she continued, in explanation to Mrs. Fane—"you know that poor papa has been the whole of Guion, Maxwell & Guion since Mr. Maxwell died. Well, then, he's to take in a partner or two, and gradually shift his business into their hands. That wouldn't take more than a couple of years at longest. Then he's going to retire, and come to live near me in England. Rupert says there's a small place close to Heneage that would just suit him. Papa has always liked the English hunting country, and so——"

"And so everything will be for the best," Rodney Temple finished. "There's nothing like a fresh young mind, like a young lady's, for settling business affairs. It would have taken you or me a long time to work that plan out, wouldn't it, Henry? We should be worried over the effect on our trusteeships and the big estates we've had the care of——"

"What about the big estates?"

Davenant noticed the tone in which Guion brought out this question, though it was an hour later before he understood its significance. It was a sharp tone, the tone of a man who catches an irritating word or two among remark he had scarcely followed. Temple apparently had meant to call it forth, since he answered, with the slightest possible air of intention.

"Oh, nothing—except what I hear."

While Miss Guion and Mrs. Fane chatted of their own affairs, Davenant remarked the way in which Henry Guion paused, his knife and fork fixed in the chicken wing on his plate, and gazed at his old friend. He bent slightly forward, too, looking, with his superb head and bust, slightly French in style, very handsome and imposing.

"Then you've been—hearing—things?"

Rodney Temple lowered his eyes in a way that confirmed Davenant—who knew his former guardian's tricks of manner—in his suppositions. He was so open in countenance that anything momentarily veiled on his part, either in speech or in address, could reasonably be attributed to stress of circumstances. The broad forehead, straightforward eyes, and large mouth imperfectly hidden by a shaggy beard and moustache, were of the kind that lend themselves to lucidity and candour. Externally he was the scholar, as distinct from the professional man or the "divine." His figure—tall, large-boned, and loose-jointed—had the slight stoop traditionally associated with study, while the profile was thrust forward as though he was peering at something just out of sight. A courtly touch in his style was probably a matter of inheritance, as was also his capacity for looking suitably attired while obviously neglectful of appearances. His thick, lank, sandy hair, fading to white, and long, narrow, stringy beard of the same transitional hue were not well cared for; and yet they helped to give him a little of the air of a Titian or Velasquez nobleman. In answer to Guion now, he spoke without lifting his eyes from his plate.

"Have I been hearing things? N-no; only that the care of big estates is a matter of great responsibility—and anxiety.

"That's what I tell papa," Miss Guion said warmly, catching the concluding words. "It's a great responsibility and anxiety. He ought to be free from it. I tell

him my marriage is a providential hint to him to give up work."

"Perhaps I shan't get the chance. Work may give up—me."

"I wish it would, papa. Then everything would be settled."

"Some things would be settled. Others might be opened—for discussion."

If Rodney Temple had not lifted his eyes in another significant look toward Guion, Davenant would have let these sentences pass unheeded. As it was, his attention was directed to possible things, or impossible things, left unsaid. For a second or two he was aware of an odd suspicion, but he brushed it away as absurd, in view of the self-assurance with which Guion roused himself at last to enter into the conversation, which began immediately to turn on persons of whom Davenant had no knowledge.

The inability to follow closely gave him time to make a few superficial observations regarding his host. In spite of the fact that Guion had been a familiar figure to him ever since his boyhood, he now saw him at really close range for the first time in years.

What struck him most was the degree to which Guion conserved his quality of Adonis. Long ago renowned, in that section of American society that clings to the cities and seaboard between Maine and Maryland, as a fine specimen of manhood, he was perhaps handsomer now, with his noble, regular features, his well-trimmed, iron-grey beard, and his splendid head of iron-grey hair, than he had been in his youth. Reckoning roughly, Davenant judged him to be sixty. He had been a personage prominently in view in the group of cities formed by Boston, Cambridge, and Waverton, ever since Davenant could remember him. Nature having created Guion an ornament to his kind, Fate had been equally beneficent

in ordaining that he should have nothing to do, on leaving the University, but walk into the excellent legal practice his grandfather had founded, and his father had brought to a high degree of honour as well as to a reasonable pitch of prosperity. It was, from the younger Guion's point of view, an agreeable practice, concerned chiefly with the care of trust funds, in which a gentleman could engage without any rough-and-tumble loss of gentility. It required little or nothing in the way of pleadings in the courts or disputing in the market-place, and—especially during the lifetime of the elder partners—left him leisure for cultivating that graceful relationship to life for which he possessed aptitudes. It was a high form of gracefulness, making it a matter of course that he should figure on the Boards of Galleries of Fine Arts and Colleges of Music, and other institutions meant to minister to his country's good through the elevation of its taste.

"It's the sort of thing he was cut out for," Davenant commented to himself, as his eye travelled from the high-bred face, where refinement blended with authority, to the essentially gentlemanly figure, on which the delicately tied cravat sat with the elegance of an orchid, while the white waistcoat, of the latest and most youthful cut, was as neatly adjusted to the person as the calyx to a bud. The mere sight of so much ease and distinction made Devanant himself feel like a rustic in his Sunday clothes, though he seized the opportunity of being in such company to enlarge his perception of the fine points of bearing. It was an improving experience of a kind which he only occasionally got.

He had an equal sense of the educational value of the conversation, to which, as it skipped from country to country and from one important name to another, it was a privilege to be a listener. His own career—except for his two excursions round the world, conscientiously undertaken in pursuit of knowledge—had been so sombrely financial that he was frankly, and

somewhat naïvely, curious concerning the people who "did things" bearing little or no relation to business, and who permitted themselves sensations merely for the sake of having them. Olivia Guion's friends, and Drusilla Fane's—admirals, generals, colonels, ambassadors, and secretaries of embassy they apparently were, for the most part—had what seemed to him an unwonted freedom of dramatic action. Merely to hear them talked about gave him glimpses of a world varied and picturesque, from the human point of view, beyond his dreams. In the exchange of scraps of gossip and latest London anecdotes between Miss Guion and Drusilla Fane, on which Henry Guion commented, Davenant felt himself to be looking at a vivid but fitfully working kinematograph, of which the scenes were snatched at random from life as lived anywhere between Washington and Simla, or Inverness and Rome. The effect was both instructive and entertaining. It was also in its way enlightening, since it showed him the true standing in the world of this woman whom he had once, for a few wild moments, hoped to make his wife.

The dinner was half over before he began clearly to detach Miss Guion from that environment which he would have called "the best Boston society." Placing her there, he would have said before this evening that he placed her as high as the reasonable human being could aspire to be set. For any one whose roots were in Waverton, "the best Boston society" would in general be taken as the state of blossoming. It came to him as a discovery, made there and then, that Olivia Guion had seized this elect state with one of her earliest tendrils, and, climbing on by way of New York and Washington, had chosen to do her actual flowering in a cosmopolitan air.

He had none of the resentment the home-bred American business man habitually feels for this kind of eccentricity. Now that he had caught the idea, he

could see at a glance, as his mind changed his metaphor, how admirably she was suited to the tapestried European setting. He was conscious even of something akin to pride in the triumphs she was capable of achieving on that richly-decorated world-stage, much as though she were some compatriot *prima donna*. He could see already how well, as the wife of Lieutenant-Colonel Rupert Ashley, she would fill the part. It had been written for her. Its strong points and its subtleties were alike of the sort wherein she would shine.

This perception of his own inward applause explained something in regard to himself about which he had been wondering ever since the beginning of dinner—the absence of any pang, of any shade of envy, to see another man win where he had been so ignominiously defeated. He saw now that it was a field on which he never *could* have won. Within "the best Boston society," he might have had a chance, though even there it must have been a poor one; but out here in the open, so to speak, where the prowess and chivalry of Christendom furnished his competitors, he had been as little in the running as a mortal at a contest of the gods. That he was no longer in love with her he had known years ago; but it palliated somewhat his old humiliation, it made the word failure easier to swallow down, to perceive that his love, when it existed, had been doomed, from the nature of things and in advance, to end in nothing, like that of the nightingale for the moon.

By dwelling too pensively on these thoughts he found he had missed some of the turns of the talk, his attention awakening to hear Henry Guion say:

"That's all very fine, but a man doesn't risk everything he holds dear in the world to go cheating at cards just for the fun of it. You may depend upon it he had a reason."

"Oh, he had a reason," Mrs. Fane agreed; "the reason of being hard up. The trouble lay in its not being good enough."

"I imagine it was good enough for him, poor devil."

"But not for any one else. He was drummed out. There wasn't a soul in the regiment to speak to him. We heard that he took another name and went abroad. Anyhow, he disappeared. It was all he could do. He was lucky to get off with that; wasn't he, Peter? wasn't he, father?"

"What he got off with," said Guion, "was a quality of tragic interest which never pertains to the people who stick to the Street called Straight."

"Oh, certainly," Mrs. Fane assented dryly. "He did acquire that. But I'm surprised to hear you commend it; aren't you, father? aren't you, Peter?"

"I'm not commending it," Guion asserted; "I only feel its force. I've a great deal of sympathy with any poor beggar in his—downfall."

"Since when?"

The look with which Rodney Temple accompanied the question once more affected Davenant oddly. It probably made the same impression on Guion, since he replied with a calmness that seemed studied:

"Since—lately. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, for no reason. It only strikes me as curious that your sympathy should take that turn."

"Precisely," Miss Guion chimed in. "It's not a bit like you, papa. You used to be harder on dishonourable things than any one."

"Well, I'm not now."

It was clear to Davenant by this time that in these words Guion was not so much making a statement as flinging a challenge. He made that evident by the way in which he sat upright, squared his shoulders, and rested a large, white fist clenched upon the table. His eyes, too, shone, glittered rather, with a light quite other than that which a host usually turns upon his guests. To Davenant, as to Mrs. Temple, it seemed as if he had "something on his mind"—something of which he had a persistent desire to talk covertly, in the way in which

an undetected felon will risk discovery to talk about the crime.

No one else, apparently, at the table shared this impression. Rodney Temple, with eyes pensively downcast, toyed with the seeds of a pear, while Miss Guion and Mrs. Fane began speaking of some other incident of what to them was above everything else, "the Service." A minute or two later Olivia rose.

"Come, Cousin Cherry. Come, Drusilla," she said, with her easy, authoritative manner. Then, apparently with an attempt to make up for her neglect of Davenant, she said, as she held the door open for the ladies to pass, "Don't let them keep you here for ever. We shall be terribly dull till you join us."

He was not too dense to comprehend that the words were conventional, as the smile she flung him was perfunctory. Nevertheless, the little attention pleased him.

II

THE three men being left together, Davenant's conviction of inner excitement on the part of his host was deepened. It was as if, on the withdrawal of the ladies, Guion had less intention of concealing it. Not that at first he said anything directly or acted otherwise than as a man with guests to entertain. It was only that he threw into the task of offering liquers and passing cigars a something febrile that caused his two companions to watch him quietly. Once or twice Davenant caught Temple's eye; but with a common impulse each hastily looked elsewhere.

"So, Mr. Davenant, you've come back to us. Got here only this afternoon, didn't you? I wonder why you came. Having got out of a dull place like Waverton, why should you return to it?"

Looking the more debonair because of the flush in his face and the gleam in his eye, Guion seated himself

in the place his daughter had left vacant between his two guests. Both his movements and his manner of speech were marked by a quick jerkiness, which, however, was not without a certain masculine grace.

"I don't know that I've any better reason," Davenant laughed, snipping off the end of his cigar, "than that which leads the ox to his stall—because he knows the way."

"Good!" Guion laughed rather loudly. Then, stopping abruptly, he continued, "I fancy you know your way pretty well in any direction you want to go, don't you?"

"I can find it—if I know where I'm going. I came back to Boston chiefly because that was just what I didn't know."

"He means," Rodney Temple explained, "that he'd got out of his beat; and so, like a wise man, he returns to his starting-point."

"I'd got out of something more than my beat; I'd got out of my element. I found that the life of elegant leisure on which I'd embarked wasn't what I'd been cut out for."

"That's interesting—very," Guion said. "How did you make the discovery?"

"By being bored to death."

"Bored?—with all your money?"

"The money isn't much; but, even if it were, it couldn't go on buying me a good time."

"That, of course, depends on what your idea of a good time may be; doesn't it, Rodney?"

"It depends somewhat," Rodney replied, "on the purchasing power of money. There are things not to be had for cash."

"I'm afraid my conception of a good time," Davenant smiled, "might be more feasible without the cash than with it. After all, money would be a doubtful blessing to a bee if it took away the task of going out to gather honey."

"A bee," Guion observed, "isn't the product of a high and complex civilization."

"Neither am I," Davenant declared, with a big laugh. "I spring from the primitive stratum of people born to work, who expect to work, and who, when they don't work, have no particular object in living on."

"And so you've come back to Boston to work?"

"To work—or something."

"You leave yourself, I see, the latitude of—something."

"Only because it's better than nothing. It's been nothing for so long now that I'm willing to make it anything."

"Make what—anything?"

"My excuse for remaining on earth. If I'm to go on doing that, I've got to have something more to justify it than the mere ability to pay my hotel bill."

"You're luckier than you know to be able to do that much," Guion said, with one of his abrupt, nervous changes of position. "But you've been uncommonly lucky, anyhow, haven't you? Made some money out of that mine business, didn't you? Or was it in sugar?"

Davenant laughed. "A little," he admitted. "But, to any one like you, sir, it would seem a trifle."

"To any one like me! Listen." He leaned forward, with feverish eyes, and spoke slowly, tapping on the table-cloth as he did so. "For half a million dollars I'd sell my soul."

Davenant resisted the impulse to glance at Temple, who spoke promptly, while Guion swallowed thirstily a glass of cognac.

"That's a good deal for a soul, Henry. It's a large amount of the sure and tangible for a very uncertain quantity of the impalpable and problematical."

Davenant laughed at this more boisterously than the degree of humour warranted. He began definitely to feel that sense of discomfort which in the last half hour he had been only afraid of. It was not the common-

place fact that Guion might be short of money that he dreaded ; it was the possibility of getting a glimpse of another man's inner secret self. He had been in this position more than once before—when men wanted to tell him things he didn't want to know—when, whipped by conscience or crazed by misfortune or hysterical from drink, they tried to rend with their own hands the veil that only the lost or the desperate suffer to be torn. He had noted before that it was generally men like Guion, of a high-strung temperament, perhaps with a feminine streak in it, who reached this pass, and because of his own reserve—his rather cowardly reserve, he called it—he was always impelled to run away from them. As there was no possibility of running away now, he could only dodge, by pretending to misunderstand, what he feared Guion was trying to say.

" So everything you undertook you pulled off successfully ? " his host questioned abruptly.

" Not everything ; some things. I lost money—often ; but on the whole I made it."

" Good ! With me it was always the other way."

The pause that followed was an uneasy one, otherwise Temple would not have seized on the first topic that came to hand to fill it up.

" You'll miss Olivia when she's gone, Henry."

" Y-yes ; if she goes."

The implied doubt startled Davenant, but Temple continued to smoke pensively. " I've thought," he said, after a puff or two at his cigar, " I've thought you seemed to be anticipating something in the way of a—hitch."

Guion held his cigar with some deliberation over an ash-tray, knocking off the ash with his little finger as though it were a task demanding precision.

" You'll know all about it, to-morrow, perhaps—or in a few days at latest. It can't be kept quiet much longer. I got the impression at dinner that you'd heard something already."

" Nothing but gossip, Henry."

Guion smiled, but with a wince. "I've noticed," he said, "that there's a certain kind of gossip that rarely gets about unless there's some cause for it—on the principle of no smoke without fire. If you've heard anything, it's probably true."

"I was afraid it might be. But in that case I wonder you allowed Olivia to go ahead."

"I had to let Fate take charge of that. When a man gets himself so entangled in a coil of barbed wire that he trips which ever way he turns, his only resource is to stand still. That's my case." He poured himself out another glass of cognac, and tasted it before continuing. "Olivia goes over to England, and gets herself engaged to a man I never heard of. Good! She fixes her wedding-day without consulting me and irrespective of my affairs. Good again! She's old enough to do it, and quite competent. Meanwhile I lose control of the machine, so to speak. I see myself racing on to something, and can't stop. I can only lie back and watch, to see what happens. I've got to leave that to fate, or God, or whatever it is that directs our affairs when we can no longer manage them ourselves." He took another sip of cognac, and pulled for a minute nervously at his cigar. "I thought at first that Olivia might be married and get off before anything happened. Now, it looks to me as if there was going to be a smash. Rupert Ashley arrives in three or four days' time, and then——"

"You don't think he'd want to back out, do you?"

"I haven't the remotest idea. From Olivia's description he seems like a decent sort; and yet——"

Davenant got to his feet. "Shouldn't you like me to go back to the ladies? You want to talk to the professor——"

"No, no," Guion said easily, pushing Davenant into his seat again. "There no reason why you shouldn't hear anything I have to say. The whole town will know it soon. You can't conceal a burning house; and Tory

Hill is on fire. I may be spending my last night under its roof."

"They'll not rush things like that," Temple said, trying to speak reassuringly.

"They haven't rushed things as it is. I've come to the end of a very long tether. I only want you to know that by this time to-morrow night I may have taken Kipling's Strange Ride with Morrowby Jukes to the Land of the Living Dead. If I do, I shan't come back—accept bail, or that sort of thing. I can't imagine anything more ghastly than for a man to be hanging around among his old friends, waiting for a—for a"—he balked at the word—"for a trial," he said at last, "that can have only end ending. No! I'm ready to ride away when they call for me—but they won't find me pining for freedom."

"Can't anything be done?"

"Not for me, Rodney. If Rupert Ashley will only look after Olivia, I shan't mind what happens next. Men have been broken on the wheel before now. I think I can go through with it as well as another. But if Ashley should fail us—and of course that's possible—well, you see why I feel as I do about her falling out with the old Marquise. Aunt Vic has always made much of her—and she's very well off——"

"Is there nothing to be expected in that quarter for yourself?"

Guion shook his head. "I couldn't ask her—not at the worst. In the natural course of things Olivia and I would be her heirs—that is, if she didn't do something else with her money—but she's still in the early seventies, and may easily go on for a long time yet. Any help there is very far in the future, so that——"

"Ashley, I take it, is a man of some means?"

"Of comfortable means—no more. He has an entailed property in the Midlands and his pay. As he has a mother and two sisters to pension off, Olivia begged to have no settlements made upon herself. He

wanted to do it, after the English fashion, but I think she showed good feeling in declining it. Naturally, I approved of her doing it, knowing how many chances there were that I mightn't be able to—to play up—myself."

After this conversation Davenant could not but marvel at the ease with which their host passed the cigars again and urged him personally to have another glass of Chartreuse. "Then suppose we join the ladies," he added, when further hospitality was declined.

Guion took the time to fleck a few specks of cigar-ash from his shirt-bosom and waistcoat, thus allowing Rodney Temple to pass out first. When alone with Davenant he laid his hand upon the younger man's arm, detaining him.

"It was hardly fair to ask you to dinner," he said, still forcing an unsteady smile, "and let you in for this. I thought at first of putting you off; but in the end I decided to let you come. To me it's been a sort of dress-rehearsal—a foretaste of what it'll be in public. The truth is, I'm a little jumpy. The rôle's so new to me that it means something to get an idea of how to play it on nerve. I recall you as a little chap," he added, in another tone, "when Tom Davenant and his wife first took you. Got you out of an orphanage, didn't they, or something like that? If I remember rightly, your name was Hall, or Hale——"

"It was Hallett—Peter Hallett."

"Hallett, was it? Well, it will do no harm for a young Cæsar of finance like you to see what you may come to if you're not careful. *Morituri te salutamus*, as the gladiators used to say. Only I wish it was to be the arena and the sword instead of the court-room and the Ride with Morrowby Jukes."

Davenant said nothing, not because he had nothing to say, but because his thoughts were incoherent. Perhaps what was most in the nature of a shock to him was the sight of a man whom he both admired

for his personality and honoured as a pillar of Boston life falling so tragically into ruin. While it was true that to his financially-gifted mind any misuse of trust funds had the special heinousness that horse-lifting has to a rancher, yet as he stood with Guion's hand on his shoulder he knew that something in the depths of his being was stirred, and stirred violently, that had rarely been affected before. He had once, as a boy, saved a woman from drowning; he had once seen a man at an upper window of a burning house turn back into the fire while the bystanders restrained him, Davenant, from attempting an impossible rescue. Something of the same unreasoning impulse rose up within him now—the impulse to save — the kind of impulse that takes no account of the merit of the person in peril, seeing only the danger.

But these promptings were dumb in him for the moment from lack of co-ordination. The two or three things he might have said seemed to strangle each other in the attempt to get right of way. In response to Guion's confidences he could only mumble something incoherent and pass on to the drawing-room door. It was a wide opening, hung with *portières*, through which he could see Olivia Guion standing by the crackling wood fire, a foot on the low fender. One hand rested lightly on the mantelpiece, while the other drew back her skirt of shimmering black from the blaze. Drusilla Fane, at the piano, was strumming one of Chopin's more familiar nocturnes.

He was still thinking of this glimpse when, a half-hour later, he said to Rodney Temple, as they walked homeward in the moonlight: "I haven't yet told you what I came back for."

"Well, what is it?"

"I thought—that is, I hoped—that if I did the way might open up for me to do what might be called—well, a little good."

"What put that into your head?" was the old man's response to this stammering confession.

"I suppose the thought occurred to me on general principles. I've always understood it was the right thing to attempt."

"Oh, right. That's another matter. Doing right is as easy as drawing breath. It's a habit, like any other. To start out to do good is much like saying you'll add a cubit to your stature. But you can always do right. Do right, and the good'll take care of itself."

Davenant reflected on this in silence as they tramped onward. By this time they had descended Tory Hill, and were on the dike that outlines the shores of the Charles.

By a common impulse both Temple and Davenant kept silent concerning Guion. On leaving Tory Hill they had elected to walk homeward, the ladies taking the carriage. The radiant moonlight and the clear crisp October air helped to restore Davenant's faculties to a normal waking condition after the nightmare of Guion's hints. Fitting what he supposed must be the facts into the perspective of common life, to which the wide, out-of-door prospect offered some analogy, they were, if not less appalling, at least less overwhelming. Without seeing what was to be done much more clearly than he had seen an hour ago, he had a freer consciousness of power—something like the matter-of-course assumption that any given situation could be met with which he ordinarily faced the world. That he lacked authority in the case was a thought that did not occur to him—no more than it occurred to him on the day when he rescued the woman from drowning, or on the night when he would have dashed into the fire to save a man.

It was not till they had descended the straggling, tree-shaded street—along which the infrequent street-lamps threw little more light than that which came from the windows shining placidly out on lawns—and had emerged on the embankment bordering the Charles, that the events of the evening began for Davenant to

weave themselves in with that indefinable desire that had led him back to Boston. He could not have said in what way they belonged together; and yet he could perceive that between them there was some such dim interpenetration as the distant lamps of the city made through the silvery mist lying on the river and its adjacent marshes like some efflorescence of the moonlight.

"The difficulty is," he said, after a long silence, "that it's often so hard to know what *is* right."

"No, it isn't."

The flat contradiction brought a smile to the young man's lips as they trudged onward.

"A good many people say so."

"A good many people say foolish things. It's hard to know what's right chiefly when you're not in a hurry to do it."

"Aren't there exceptions to that rule?"

"I allowed for the exceptions. I said *chiefly*."

"But when you *do* want to do it?"

"You'll know what it is. There'll be something to tell you."

"And this something to tell you? What do you call it?"

"Some call it conscience. Some call it God. Some call it neither."

Davenant reflected again.

"And you? What do you call it?"

"I can't see that anything would be gained by telling you. That sort of knowledge isn't of much use till it's worked out for oneself. At least, it wouldn't be of much use to you."

"Why not to me?"

"Because you've started out on your own voyage of discovery. You'll bring back more treasures from that adventure than any one can give you."

These things were said crustily, as though dragged from a man thinking of other matters and unwilling

to talk. More minutes went by before Davenant spoke again.

"But doesn't it happen that what you call the 'something-to-tell-you' tells you now and then to do things that most people would call rather wild—or crazy?"

"I dare say."

"So what then?"

"Then you do them."

"Oh, but——"

"If there's an 'Oh, but,' you don't. That's all. You belong to the many called, but not to the few chosen."

"But if things *are* wild—I'm thinking of something in particular——"

"Then you'd better leave it alone, unless you're prepared to be considered a wild man. What Paul did was wild—and Peter—and Joan of Arc—and Columbus—and a good many others. True, they were well punished for their folly. Most of them were put in irons, and some of them got death."

"I shouldn't dream of classing myself in their company."

"Every one's in their company who feels a big impulse and has the courage of it. The trouble with most of us is that we can do the feeling all right; but when it comes to the execution—well, we like to keep on the safe side, among the sane."

"So that," Davenant began stammeringly, "if a fellow got something into his head—something that couldn't be wrong you know—something that would be right—awfully right in its way, but in a way that most people would consider all wrong—or wild, as I said before—you'd advise him——?"

"I shouldn't advise him at all. Some things must be spontaneous, or they're of little use. If a good seed in good ground won't germinate of its own accord, words of counsel can't help it. But here we are at home. You won't come in just yet? Very well; you've got your latch-key."

"Good-night, sir. I hope you're not going to think me—well, altogether an idiot."

"Very likely I shall; but it'll be nothing if I do. If you can't stand a little thing like that you'd better not have come back with the ideas that have brought you."

III

DAVENANT turned away into the moonlit mist. Through it the electric lamps of Boston, curving in crescent lines by the water's edge, or sprinkled at random over the hill which the city climbs, shone for him with the steadiness and quiet comfort inherent in the familiar and the sure after his long roaming. Lighting a cigarette, he strode along the cement pavement beside the iron railing below which the river ran swiftly and soundlessly. At this late hour of the evening he had the embankment to himself, save for an occasional pair of lovers or a group of sauntering students. Lights from the dignified old houses—among which was Rodney Temple's—overlooking the embankment and the Charles threw out a pleasant glow of friendliness. Beyond the river a giant shadow looming through the mist reminded him of the Roman Colosseum seen in a like aspect, the resemblance being accentuated in his imagination by the Stadium's vast silence, by its rows upon rows of ghostly grey sedilia looking down on a haunted, empty ring. His thoughts strayed to Rome, to Cairo, to Calcutta, to Singapore, to the stages of those two patient journeys round the world, made from a sense of duty, in search of a widening of that sheerly human knowledge which life had hitherto denied him. Having started from London and got back to London again, he saw how imperfectly he had profited by his opportunities, how much he had missed. It was characteristic of him to begin all over again, and more

thoroughly, conscientiously revisiting the Pyramids, the Parthenon, and the Taj Mahal, endeavouring to capture some of that true spirit of appreciation of which he read in books.

In his way he was not wholly unsuccessful, since by dint of steady gazing he heightened his perceptive powers, whether it were for Notre Dame, the Sistine Madonna, or the Alps, each of which he took with the same seriousness. What eluded him was precisely that human element which was the primary object of his quest. He learned to recognise the beauty of a picture or a mountain more or less at sight; but the soul of these things, of which he thought more than of their outward aspects, the soul that looks through the eyes and speaks with the tongues of peoples, remained inaccessible to his yearnings. He was always outside—never more than a tourist. He made acquaintances by the wayside easily enough, but only of the rootless variety, beginning without an introduction and ending without a farewell. There was nothing that "belonged" to him, nothing to which he himself "belonged."

It was the persistency of the defect that had marked most of his life, even that portion of it spent in Boston and Waverton—the places he called "home." He was their citizen only by adoption, as only by adoption he was the son of Tom and Sarah Davenant. That intimate claim—the claim on the family, the claim on the soil—which springs of birth and antedates it was not his, and something had always been lacking to his life because of the deficiency. Too healthily genial to feel this want more than obscurely, he nevertheless had tried to remedy it by resorting to the obvious means. He had tried to fall in love, with a view to marriage and a family. Once, perhaps twice, he might have been successful had it not been for the intrusive recollection of a moment, years before, when a girl whom he knew to be proud without suspecting how proud she was, had, in answer to the first passionate words he ever uttered,

started to her feet, and, fanning herself languidly, walked away. The memory of that instant froze on his tongue words that might have made him happy, sending him back into his solitary ways. They were ways, as he saw plainly enough, that led no whither; for which reason he had endeavoured, as soon as he was financially justified, to get out of them by taking a long holiday and travelling round the world.

He was approaching the end of his second journey when the realization came to him that as far as his great object was concerned the undertaking had been a failure. He was as much outside the broader current of human sympathies as ever. Then, all at once, he began to see the reason why.

The first promptings of this discovery came to him one spring evening as he stood on the deck of the steam-launch he had hired at Shanghai to go up and down the Yangtze-kiang. Born in China, the son of a medical missionary, he had taken a notion to visit his birthplace at Hankow. It was a pilgrimage he had shirked on his first trip to that country, a neglect for which he afterwards reproached himself. All things considered, to make it was as little as he could do in memory of the brave man and woman to whom he owed his existence.

Before this visit, it must be admitted, Rufus and Corinna Hallett, his parents according to the flesh, had been as remote and mythical to the mind of Peter Davenant as the Dragon's Teeth to their progeny, the Spartans. Merely in the most commonplace kind of data he was but poorly supplied concerning them. He knew his father had once been a zealous young doctor in Graylands, Illinois, and had later become one of the pioneers of medical enterprise in the mission field; he knew, too, that he had already worked for some years at Hankow before he met and married Miss Corinna Meecham, formerly of Drayton, Georgia, but at that time a teacher in a Chinese school supported by one of

the great American Churches. Events after that seemed to have followed rapidly. Within a few years the babe who was to become Peter Davenant had seen the light, the mother had died, and the father had perished as the victim of a rising in the interior of Hupeh. The child, being taken to America and unclaimed by relatives, was brought up in the institution maintained for such cases by the Missionary Board of the Church to which his father and mother had given their services. He had lived there till, when he was seven years old, Tom and Sarah Davenant, childless and yet longing for a child, had adopted him.

These short and simple annals furnished all that Davenant knew of his own origin; but after the visit to Hankow the personality of his parents at least became more vivid. He met old people who could vaguely recall them. He saw entries in the hospital records made by his father's hand. He stood by his mother's grave. As for his father's grave, if he had one, it was like that of Moses, on some lonely Nebo in Hupeh known to God alone. In the compound Davenant saw the spot on which his father's simple house had stood—the house in which he himself was born—though a wing of the modern hospital now covered it. It was a relief to him to find that, except for the proximity of the lepers' ward and the opium refuge, the place, with its trim lawns, its roses, its clematis, its azaleas, its wistaria, had the sweetness of an English rectory garden. He liked to think that Corinna Meecham had been able to escape from her duties in the crowded, fetid, multi-coloured city right outside the gates to something like peace and decency within these quiet walls.

He was not a born traveller; still less was he an explorer. At the end of three days he was glad to take leave of his hosts at the hospital and turn his launch down the river toward the civilization of Shanghai. But it was on the very afternoon of his departure that the ideas came to him which ultimately took him back

to Boston, and of which he was now thinking as he strolled through the silvery mist beside the Charles.

He had been standing then on the deck of his steam-launch gazing beyond the river, with its crowding, outlandish junks, beyond the towns and villages huddled along the banks, beyond walls gay with wistaria, beyond green rice-fields stretching into the horizon, to where a flaming sunset covered half the sky—a sunset which itself seemed hostile, mysterious, alien, Mongolian. He was thinking that it was on just this scene that his father and mother had looked year upon year before his birth. He wondered how it was that it had had no prenatal influence on himself. He wondered how it was that all their devotion had ended with themselves, that their altruism had died when Corinna Meecham's soul had passed away and Rufus Hallett, like another Stephen, had fallen on his knees beneath the missiles of the villagers to whom he was coming with relief. They had spent their lives in the service of others; he had spent his in his own. It was curious. If there was anything in heredity, he ought to have felt some faint impulse from their zeal; but he never had. He could not remember that he had ever done anything for anyone. He could not remember that he had ever seen the need of it. It was curious. He mused on it—mused on the odd differences between one generation and another, and on the queer way in which what is light to the father will sometimes become darkness in the son.

It was then that he found the question raising itself within him, "Is that what's wrong with me?"

The query took him by surprise. It was so out of keeping with his particular kind of self-respect that he found it almost droll. If he had never given himself to others, as his parents had, he had certainly paid the world all he owed it. He had nothing wherewith to reproach himself on that score. It had been a matter of satisfaction amounting to pride that he had made his bit of money without resorting in any single instance to

methods that could be considered shady. If complaint or criticism could not reach him here, it could not reach him anywhere. Therefore the question as to whether there was anything wrong in his attitude towards others was so patently absurd that it could easily be dismissed.

He dismissed it promptly, but it came again. It came repeatedly during that spring and summer. It forced itself on his attention. It became, in its way, the recurrent companion of his journey. It turned up unexpectedly at all sorts of times and in all sorts of places, and on each occasion with an increased comprehension on his side of its pertinence. He could look back now and trace the stages by which his understanding of it had progressed. There was a certain small happening in a restaurant at Yokohama; there was an accident on the dock at Vancouver; there was a conversation on a moonlight evening up at Banff; there was an incident during a drive in the Yosemite; these were mile-stones on the road by which his mind had travelled on to seize the fact that the want of touch between him and his fellow-men might be due to the suppression of some essentially human force within himself. It came to him that something might, after all, have been transmitted from Hupeh and Hankow of which he had never hitherto suspected the existence.

It cannot be said that his self-questioning had produced any answer more definite than that before he found himself journeying back towards Boston. The final impulse had been given him while he was still loitering aimlessly in Chicago by a letter from Mrs. Temple.

"If you have nothing better to do, dear Peter," she wrote, "we shall be delighted if you can come to us for a week or two. Dear Drusilla is with us once again, and you can imagine our joy at having her. It would seem like old times if you were here to complete the little circle. The room you used to have in your college vacations—after dear Tom and Sarah were taken from

us—is all ready for you ; and Drusilla would like to know you were here to occupy it just as much as we."

In accepting this invitation Davenant knew himself to be drawn by a variety of strands of motive, no one of which had much force in itself, but which when woven together lent one another strength. Now that he had come, he was glad to have done it, since in the combination of circumstances he felt there must be an acknowledged need of a young man, a strong man, a man capable of shouldering responsibilities. He would have been astonished to think that that could be gainsaid.

The feeling was confirmed in him after he had watched the tip of his smoked-out cigarette drop, like a tiny star, into the current of the Charles, and he had re-entered Rodney Temple's house.

"Here's Peter!"

It was Drusilla's voice, with a sob in it. She was sitting on the stairs, three steps from the top, huddled into a voluminous mauve-and-white dressing-gown. In the one dim light burning in the hall her big black eyes gleamed tragically, as those of certain animals gleam in dusk.

"Oh, Peter dear, I'm so glad you've come! The most awful thing has happened."

That was Mrs. Temple, who, wrapped in something fleecy in texture and pink in hue, was crouched on the lowest step, looking more than ever like a tea-cosy dropped by accident.

"What's the matter?" Davenant asked, too deeply astonished even to take off his hat. "Is it burglars? Where's the professor?"

"He's gone to bed. It isn't burglars. I wish it was. It's something far, far worse. Collins told Drusilla. Oh, I know it's true—though Rodney wouldn't say so. I simply . . . *know* . . . it's . . . *true*."

"Oh, it's true," Drusilla corroborated. "I knew that the minute Collins began to speak. It explains every-

thing—all the little queernesses I've noticed ever since I came home—and everything."

"What is it?" Peter asked again. "Who's Collins? And what has he said?"

"It isn't a he; it's a she," Drusilla explained. "She's my maid. I knew the minute I came into the room that she'd got something on her mind—I knew it by the way she took my wrapper from the wardrobe and laid it on the bed. It was too awful!"

"What was too awful? The way she laid your wrapper on the bed?"

"No; what she told me. And I *know* it's true."

"Well, for the Lord's sake, Drusilla, what is it?"

Drusilla began to narrate. She had forborne, she said, to put any questions till she was being "undone;" but in that attitude, favourable for confidence, she had asked Collins over her shoulder if anything troubled her, and Collins had told her tale. Briefly, it was to the effect that some of the most distinguished kitchens in Boston and Waverton had been divided into two factions, one pro and the other contra, ever since the day, now three weeks ago, when Miss Maggie Murphy, whose position of honourable service at Lawyer Benn's enabled her to profit by the hints dropped at that eminent man's table, had announced, in the servants' dining-room of Tory Hill itself, that Henry Guion was "going to be put in jail." He had stolen Mrs Clay's money and Mrs. Rodman's money, "and a lot of other payple's money, too," Miss Murphy was able to affirm—clients for whom Guoin, Maxwell & Guoin had long acted as trustees—and was now to be tried and sentenced, Lawyer Benn himself being put in charge of the affair by the parties wronged. Drusilla described the sinking of her own heart as these bits of information were given her, though she had not failed to reprimand Collins for the repetition of foolish gossip. This, it seemed, had put Collins on her mettle in defence of her own order, and she had replied that, if it came to that, m'm, the contents of the waste-

paper baskets at Tory Hill, though slightly damaged, had borne ample testimony to the truth of the tale as Miss Maggie Murphy told it. If Mrs. Fane required documentary evidence, Collins herself was in a position to supply it, through the kindness of her colleagues in Henry Guion's employ.

Davenant listened in silence. "So the thing is out?" was his only comment.

"It's out—and all over the place," Drusilla answered tearfully. "We're the only people who haven't known it—but it's always that way with those who are most concerned."

"And over three hundred guests invited to Olivia's wedding next Thursday fortnight! And the British Military Attaché coming from Washington! And Lord Woolwich from Ottawa! What's to happen *I* don't know."

Mrs. Temple raised her hands and let them drop heavily.

"Oh, Peter, can't you do anything?"

"What can he do, child? If Henry's been making away with all that money it would take a fortune to——"

"Oh, men can do things—in business," Drusilla asserted. "I know they can. Banks lend them money, *don't* they, Peter? Banks are always lending money to tide people over. I've often heard of it. Oh, Peter, *do* something. I'm so glad you're here. It seems like a providence."

"Colonel Ashley will be here next week, too," Mrs. Temple groaned, as though the fact brought comfort.

"Oh, mother dear, don't *speak* of him!" Drusilla put up her two hands, palms outward, before her averted face, as though to banish thes uggestion. "If you'd ever known him you'd see how impossible—how *impossible*—this kind of situation is for a man like him. Poor, poor Olivia! It's impossible for her, too, I know; but then we Americans—well, we're more used to things. But one thing is certain, anyhow," she continued, rising

in her place on the stairs and stretching out her hand oratorically: "If this happens I shall never go back to Southsea—never, never!—no, nor to Silchester. With my temperament I couldn't face it. My career will be over. There'll be nothing left for *me*, mother dear, but to stay at home with father and you."

Mrs. Temple rose, sighing heavily. "Well, I suppose we must go to bed, though I must say it seems harder to do that than almost anything. None of us'll sleep."

"Oh, Peter, *won't* you do something?"

Drusilla's hands were clasped beneath an imploring face, slightly tilted to one side. Her black hair had begun to tumble to her shoulders.

"I'll—I'll think it over," was all he could find to answer.

"Oh, *thank* you, Peter! I must say it seems like a providence—your being here. With my temperament I always feel that there's nothing like a big strong man to lean on."

The ladies retired, leaving him to put out the light. For a long time he stood, as he had entered, just inside the front door leaning on his stick and wearing his hat and overcoat. He was musing rather than thinking—musing on the odd way in which he seemed almost to have been waited for. Then, irrelevantly perhaps, there shot across his memory the phrases used by Rodney Temple less than an hour ago:

"Some call it conscience. Some call it God. Some call it neither. But," he added slowly, "some *do* call it God."

IV

CLOSING the door behind his departing guests, Guion stood for a minute, with his hand still on the knob, pressing his forehead against the woodwork. He listened to the sound of the carriage

wheels dying away and to the crunching tread of the two men down the avenue.

"The last Guion has received the last guest at Tory Hill," he said to himself. "That's all over—all over and done with. Now!"

It was the hour to which he had been looking forward first as an impossibility, then as a danger, and at last as an expectation, ever since the day, now some years ago, when he began to fear that he might not be able to restore all the money he had "borrowed" from the properties in his trust. Having descried it from a long way off, he knew that with reasonable luck it could not overtake him soon. There were many chances, indeed, that it might never overtake him at all. Times might change; business might improve; he might come in for the money he expected from his old aunt de Melcourt; he might die. If none of these things happened there were still ways and means by which he might make money in big strokes and "square himself" without anyone ever being the wiser. He had known of cases, or, at least, he had suspected them, in which men in precisely his position had averted by daring play the deadliest peril and gone down into honoured graves. Fortune had generally favoured him hitherto, and probably would favour him again.

So after the first dreadful days of seeing his "mistakes," and, in his recoil, calling himself by opprobrious names, he began to get used to his situation and boldly to meet its requirements. That he would prove equal to them he had scarcely any doubt. It was, in fact, next to inconceivable that a man of his antecedents and advantages should be unable to cope with conditions that, after all, were not wholly exceptional in the sordid history of business.

He admitted that the affair was sordid, while finding an excuse for his own connection with it in the involuntary defilement that comes from touching pitch. It was impossible he said, for a man of business not to touch

pitch, and he was not a man of business of his own accord. The state of life had been forced on him. He was a trustee of other people's property by inheritance, just as a man becomes a tsar. As a career it was one of the last he would have chosen. Had he received from his father an ample personal fortune instead of a mere lucrative practice he would have been a country gentleman, in the English style, with, of course, a house in town. Born with a princely aptitude for spending his own money, he felt it hard that he should have been compelled to make it his life's work to husband that of others. The fact that he had always to some extent been a square man in a round hole seemed to entitle him to a large share of moral allowance, especially in his judgment on himself. He emphasized the last consideration, since it enabled him, in his moments of solitude, to look himself more straightly in the face. It helped him to buttress up his sense of honour, and so his sense of energy, to be able to say, "I am still a gentleman."

He came in time to express it otherwise, and to say, "I must still play the gentleman." He came to define also what he meant by the word *still*. The future presented itself as a succession of stages, in which this could not happen till that had happened, nor the final disaster arrive till all the intervening phases of the situation had been passed. He had passed them. Of late he had seen that the flames of hell would get hold upon him at that exact instant when, the last defence having been broken down and the last shift resorted to, he should turn the key on all outside hope and be alone with himself and the knowledge that he could do no more. Till then he could ward them off, and he had been fighting them to the latest second. But on coming home from his office in Boston that afternoon he had told himself that the game was up. Nothing as far as he could see would give him the respite of another four-and-twenty hours. The minutes between him and the

final preparations could be counted with the finger on the clock.

In the matter of preparation the most important detail would be to tell Olivia. Hoping against hope that this would never become necessary, he had put off the evil moment till the postponement had become cruel. But he had lived through it so often in thought, he had so acutely suffered with her in imagination the staggering humiliation of it all, that now, when the time had come, his feelings were benumbed. As he turned into his own grounds that day it seemed to him that his deadness of emotion was such that he could carry the thing through mechanically as a skilled surgeon uses a knife. If he found her at tea in the drawing-room he might tell her then.

He found her at tea, but there were people with her. He was almost sorry; and yet it keyed him up to see that there was some necessity "to still play the gentleman." He played it, and played it well—with much of his old-time ease. The feat was so extraordinary as to call out a round of mental applause for himself; and, after all, he reflected, there would be time enough in the evening.

But tea being over, Miss Guion announced that Mr. and Mrs. Temple and Drusilla Fane were coming informally to dinner, bringing with them a guest of theirs, "someone of the name of Davenant." For an instant he felt that he must ask her to telephone and put them off, but on second thoughts it seemed better to let them come. It would be in the nature of a reprieve, not so much for himself as for Olivia. It would give her one more cheerful evening, the last, perhaps, in her life. Besides—the suggestion was a vague one, sprung doubtless of the hysterical element in his suppressed excitement—he might test his avowals on Temple and Davenant, getting a foretaste of what it would be to face the world. He formed no precise intention of doing that; he only allowed his mind to linger on the luxury of trying it.

He had suspected lately that Rodney Temple knew more of his situation than he had ever told him, so that the way to speak out would be cleared in advance; and as for the man of the name of Davenant—probably Tom Davenant's adopted son, who was said to have pulled off some good things a few years ago—there would be, in humbling himself before one so successful, a morbid joy of the kind the devotee may get in being crushed by an idol.

In this he was not mistaken. While they were there he was able to draw from his own speeches, covert or open, the relief that comes to a man in pain from moaning. Now that they were gone, however, the last extraneous incident that could possibly stand between him and the beginning of the end had passed. The moment he had foreseen, as one foresees death, was on him; so, raising his head from the woodwork of the doorway, he braced himself, and said, "Now!"

At almost the same instant he heard the rustle of his daughter's skirts as she came from the drawing-room on her way upstairs. She advanced slowly down the broad hall, the lights striking iridescent rays from the trimmings of her dress. The long train, adding to her height, enhanced her gracefulness. Only that curious deadness of sensation of which he had been aware all day—the inability to feel any more that comes from too much suffering—enabled him to keep his ground before her. He did keep it, advancing from the doorway two or three steps toward her, till they met at the foot of the stairway.

"Have you enjoyed your evening?" were the words he found himself saying, though they were far from those he had at heart. He felt that his smile was ghastly; but, as she seemed not to perceive it, he drew the conclusion that the ghastliness was within.

She answered languidly. "Yes, so-so. It might have been pleasanter if it hadn't been for that awful man."

"Who? Young Davenant? I don't see anything awful about him."

"I daresay there isn't, really—in his place. He may be only prosy. However," she added, more brightly, "it doesn't matter for once. Good-night, papa dear. You look tired. You ought to go to bed. I've seen to the windows in the drawing-room, but I haven't put out the lights."

Having kissed him and patted him on the cheek, she turned to go up the stairway. He allowed her to ascend a step or two. It was the minute to speak.

"I'm sorry you feel that way about young Davenant. I rather like him."

He had not chosen the words. They came out automatically. To discuss Davenant offered an excuse for detaining her, while postponing the blow for a few minutes more

"Oh, men would," she said indifferently, without turning round. "He's their style."

"Which is to his discredit?"

"Not to his discredit, but to his advantage. I've noticed that what they call a man's man is generally something of a bore."

"Davenant isn't a bore."

"Isn't he? Well, I really didn't notice in particular. I only remember that he used to be about here years ago—and I didn't like him. I suppose Drusilla has to be civil to h m because he was Cousin Rodney's ward."

She had paused on the landing at the angle of the staircase.

"He's good-looking," Guion said, in continued effort to interpose the trivial between himself and what he had still to tell her.

"Oh, that sort of Saxon giant type is always good-looking. Of course. And dull too."

"I daresay he isn't as dull as you think."

"He might be that, and still remain pretty dull, after the allowances had been made. I know the type. It's

awful—especially in the form of the American man of business."

"I'm an American man of business myself."

"Yes; by misadventure. You're the business man made, but not born. By nature you're a boulevardier, or what the newspapers call a 'clubman.' I admire you more than I can say—everybody admires you—for making such a success of a work that must always have been uncongenial at the least."

The opening was obvious. Nothing could have been more opportune. Two or three beginnings presented themselves, and as he hesitated, choosing between them, he moistened his lips and wiped the cold perspiration from his brow. After all, the blessed apathy within him was giving way and going to play him false! He had a minute of feeling as the condemned man must feel when he catches sight of the guillotine.

Before his parched tongue could formulate syllables she mounted another step or two of the staircase, and turned again, leaning on the banister and looking over. He noticed—by a common trick of the perceptive powers at crises of anguish—how the slender white pilasters, carved and twisted in sets of four, in the fashion of Georgian houses like Tory Hill, made quaint, graceful lines up and down the front of her black gown.

"It's really true—what I say about business, papa," she pursued. "I'm very much in earnest, and so is Rupert. I do wish you'd think of that place near Heneage. It will be so lovely for me to feel you're there; and there can't be any reason for your going on working any longer."

"No; there's no reason for that," he managed to say.

"Well, then?" she demanded, with an air of triumph. "It's just as I said. You owe it to everyone, you owe it to me, you owe it to yourself above all, to give up. It might have been better if you'd done it long ago."

"I couldn't," he declared, in a tone that sounded to

his own ears as a cry. "I tried to . . . but things were so involved . . . almost from the first. . . ."

"Well, as long as they're not involved now there's no reason why it shouldn't be better late than never."

"But they *are* involved now," he said, with an intensity so poignant that he was surprised she didn't notice it.

"Then straighten them out. Isn't that what we've been saying all along, Cousin Rodney and I? Take a partner; take two partners. Cousin Rodney says you should have done it when Mr. Maxwell died, or before——"

"I couldn't. . . . Things weren't shipshape enough . . . not even then."

"I'm sure it could be managed," she asserted confidently; "and if you don't do it now, papa, when I'm being married and going away for good, you'll never do it at all. That's my fear. I don't want to live over there without you, papa; and I'm afraid that's what you're going to let me in for." She moved from the banister and continued her way upward, speaking over her shoulder as she ascended. "In the meantime, you really *must* go to bed. You look tired and rather pale—just as I do after a dull party. Good-night; and *don't* stay up."

She reached the floor above, and went toward her room. He felt strangled, speechless. There was a sense of terror too in the thought that his nerve, the nerve on which he had counted so much, was going to fail him.

"Olivia!"

His voice was so sharp that she hurried back to the top of the stairs.

"What is it, papa? Aren't you well?"

It was the sight of her face, anxious and suddenly white, peering down through the half-light of the hall that finally unmanned him. With a heart-sick feeling he turned away from the stairway.

"Yes; I'm all right. I only wanted you to know . . . that . . . that . . . I shall be working rather late. You mustn't be disturbed . . . if you hear me moving about."

He would have upbraided himself more bitterly for his cowardice had he not found an excuse in the thought that, after all, there would be time in the morning. It was best that she should have the refreshment of the night. The one thing important was that she should not have the shock of learning from others on the morrow that he was not coming back—that he was going to Singville. Should he go there at all, he was determined to stay. Since he had no fight to put up, it was better that his going should be once for all. The thought of weeks, of months, perhaps, of quasi-freedom, during which he should be parading himself "on bail," was far more terrible to him than that of prison. He must prepare her for the beginning of his doom at all costs to himself; but, he reasoned, she would be more capable of taking the information calmly in the daylight of the morning than now, at a few minutes to midnight.

It was another short reprieve, enabling him to give all his attention to the tasks before him. If he was not to come back to Tory Hill he must leave his private papers there, his more intimate treasures, in good order. Certain things would have to be put away, others rearranged, others destroyed. For the most part they were in the library, the room he specially claimed as his own. Before setting himself to the work there he walked through some of the other rooms, turning out the lights.

In doing so he was consciously taking a farewell. He had been born in this house; in it he had spent his boyhood; to it he had come back as a young married man. He had lived in it till his wife and he had set up their more ambitious establishment in Boston, an extravagance from which, perhaps, all the subsequent misfortunes could be dated. He had known at the time that his

father, had he lived, would have condemned the step; but he himself was a believer in fortunate chances. Besides, it was preposterous for a young couple of fashion to continue living in a rambling old house that belonged to neither town nor country, at a time when the whole trend of life was cityward. They had discussed the move, with its large increase of expenditure, from every point of view, and found it one which from which, in their social position, there was no escape. It was a matter about which they had hardly any choice.

So, too, a few years later, with the taking of the cottage at Newport. It was forced on them. When all their friends were doing something of the sort it seemed absurd to hesitate because of a mere matter of means—especially when by hook or by crook the means could be procured. Similar reasoning had attended their various residences abroad—in London, Paris, Rome. Country-houses in England or villas on the Riviera became matters of necessity, according to the demands of Olivia's entry into the world of fashion or Mrs. Guion's health.

It was not till the death of the latter, some seven years ago, that Guion, obliged to pause, was able to take cognizance of the degree to which he had imperilled himself in the years of effort to maintain their way of life. It could not be said that at the time he regretted what he had done, but he allowed it to frighten him into some ineffectual economies. He exchanged the cottage at Newport for one at Lenox, and, giving up the house in Boston, withdrew to Tory Hill. Ceasing himself to go into society, he sent his daughter abroad for a large portion of her time, either in the care of Madame de Melcourt or, in London, under the wing of some of the American ladies prominent in English life.

Having taken these steps, with no small pride in his capacity for sacrifice, Guion set himself seriously to reconstruct his own fortune and to repair the inroads

he had made on those in his trust. It was a matter in which he had but few misgivings as to his capacity. The making of money, he often said, was an easy thing, as could be proved by the intellectual grade of the men who made it. One had only to look about one to see that they were men in whom the average of ability was by no means high, men who achieved their successes largely by a kind of rule of thumb. They got the knack of investment—and they invested. He preferred the word investment to another which might have challenged comment. They bought in a low market and sold in a high one—and the trick was done. Some instinct—a *flair*, he called it—was required in order to recognise, more or less at sight, those properties which would quickly and surely appreciate in value ; and he believed he possessed it. Given the control of a few thousands as a point of departure, and the financial ebb and flow, a man must be a born fool, he said, not to be able to make a reasonable fortune with reasonable speed.

Within the office of Guion, Maxwell & Guion circumstances favoured the accession to power of the younger partner, who had hitherto played an acquiescent rather than an active part. Mr. Maxwell was old and ailing, though neither so ailing nor so old as to be blind to the need of new blood, new money, and new influence in the fine old firm. His weakness was that he hated beginning all over again with new men ; so that when Smith and Jones were proposed as possible partners he easily admitted whatever objections Guion raised to them, and the matter was postponed. It was postponed again. It slipped into a chronic condition of postponement ; and Mr. Maxwell died.

The situation calling then for adroitness on Guion's part, the fact that he was able to meet it to the satisfaction of all the parties concerned increased his confidence in his own astuteness. True, it required some manipulation, some throwing of dust into people's eyes, some making of explanations to one person that could

not be reconciled with those made to another ; but here again the circumstances helped him. His clients were for the most part widows and old maids, many of them resident abroad, for whom Guion, Maxwell & Guion had so long stood, in the matter of income, for the embodiment of paternal care that they were ready to believe anything and say anything and sign anything they were told to. With the legal authorities to whom he owed account he had the advantage of the house's high repute, making it possible to cover with formalities anything that might, strictly speaking, have called for investigation. Whatever had to be considered shifty he excused to himself on the ground of its being temporary ; while it was clearly, in his opinion, to the ultimate advantage of the Clay heirs and the Rodman heirs and the Compton heirs, and all the other heirs for whom Guoin, Maxwell & Guion were *in loco parentis*, that he should have a free hand.

The sequel astonished rather than disillusioned him. It wrought in him disappointment with the human race, especially as represented by the Stock Exchange, without diminishing his confidence in his own judgment. Through all his wild efforts not to sink he was upborne by the knowledge that it was not his calculations that were wrong, but the workings of a system more obscure than that of chance and more capricious than the weather. He grew to consider it the fault of the blind forces that make up the social, financial, and commercial worlds, and not his own, when he was reduced to a frantic flinging of good money after bad as offering the sole chance of working out his redemption.

And, now that it was all over, he was glad his wife had not lived to see the end. That, at least, had been spared him. He stood before her portrait in the drawing-room—the much-admired portrait by Carolus Duran—and told her so. She was so living as she looked down on him—a suggestion of refined irony about the lips and eyes giving personality to the delicate oval of the face—

that he felt himself talking to her as they had been wont to talk together ever since their youth. In his way he had stood in awe of her. The assumption of prerogative —an endowment of manner or of temperament, he was never quite sure which—inherited by Olivia in turn, had been the dominating influence in their domestic life. He had not been ruled by her—the term would have been grotesque—he had only made it his pleasure to carry out her wishes. That her wishes led him on to spending money not his own was due to the fact, ever to be regretted, that his father had not bequeathed him money so much as the means of earning it. She could not be held responsible for that, while she was the type of woman to whom it was something like an outrage not to offer the things befitting to her station. There was no reproach in the look he lifted on her now—nothing but a kind of dogged, perverse thankfulness that she should have had the way of life she craved, without ever knowing the price he was about to pay for it.

In withdrawing his glance from hers he turned it about on the various objects in the room. Many of them had stood in their places since before he was born; others he had acquired at occasional sales of Guion property, so that, as the different branches of the family became extinct or disappeared, whatever could be called "ancestral" might have a place at Tory Hill; others he had collected abroad. All of them, in these moments of anguish—the five K'anghsi vases on the mantelpiece, brought home by some seafaring Guion of Colonial days, the armorial "Lowestoft" in the cabinets, the Copley portraits of remote connexions on the walls, the bits of Chippendale and Hepplewhite that had belonged to the grandfather who built Tory Hill—all of them took on a new kind of personality, as with living look and utterance. He had loved them and been proud of them; and as he turned out the lights, leaving them to darkness, eyes could not have been more appealing nor lips more eloquent than they in their mute farewell.

Returning to the library, he busied himself with his main undertaking. He was anxious that nothing should be left behind that could give Olivia additional pain, while whatever she might care to have, her mother's letters to himself, or other family documents, might be ready to her hand. It was the kind of detail to which he could easily give his attention. He worked methodically and phlegmatically, steeling himself to a grim suppression of regret. He was almost sorry to finish the task, since it forced his mind to come again face to face with facts. The clock struck two as he closed the last drawer and knew that that part of his preparation was completed.

In reading the old letters, with their echoes of old incidents, old joys, old jokes, old days in Paris, Rome, or England, he had been so wafted back to another time that on pushing in the drawer, which closed with a certain click of finality, the realization of the present rolled back on his soul with a curious effect of amazement. For a few minutes it was as if he had never understood it, never thought of it before. They were going to make him, Henry Guion, a prisoner, a criminal, a convict! They were going to clip his hair, and shave his beard, and dress him in a hideous garb, and shut him in a cell! They were going to give him degrading work to do, and degrading rules to keep, and degrading associates to live with, as far as such existence could be called living with anyone at all. They were going to do this for year upon year, all the rest of his life, since he never could survive it. He was to have nothing any more to come in between him and his own thoughts—his thoughts of Olivia brought to disgrace, of the Clay heirs brought to want, of the Rodman heirs and the Compton heirs deprived of half their livelihood! He had called it that evening the Strange Ride with Morrowby Jukes to the Land of the Living Dead, but it was to be worse than that. It was to be worse than Macbeth with his visions of remorse; it was to be worse than Vathek with the flame burning

in his heart; it was to be worse than Judas—who at least could hang himself.

He got up and went to a mirror in the corner of the room. The mere sight of himself made the impossible seem more impossible. He was so fine a specimen—he could not but know it!—so much the free man, the honourable man, the man of the world! He tried to see himself with his hair clipped and his beard shaven and the white cravat and waistcoat replaced by the harlequin costume of the jailbird. He tried to see himself making his own bed, and scrubbing his own floor, and standing at his cell door with a tin pot in his hand, waiting for his skilly. It was so absurd, so out of the question, that he nearly laughed outright. He was in a dream—in a nightmare! He shook himself, he pinched himself, in order to wake up. He was ready in sudden rage to curse the handsome, familiar room for the persistence of its reality, because the rows of books and the Baxter prints and the desks and chairs and electric lights refused to melt away like things in a troubled sleep.

It was then that for the first time he began to taste the real measure of his impotence. He was in the hand of the law. He was in the grip of the sternest avenging forces human society could set in motion against him; and quibbles, shifts, and subterfuges swept aside, no one knew better than himself that his punishment would be just.

It was a strange feeling, the feeling of having put himself outside the scope of mercy. But there he was! There could never be a word spoken in his defence, nor in any one's heart a throb of sympathy toward him. He had forfeited everything. He could expect nothing from any man, and from his daughter least of all. The utmost he could ask for her was that she should marry, go away, and school herself as nearly as might be to renounce him. That she should do it utterly would not be possible; but something would be accomplished if

pride or humiliation or resentment gave her the spirit to carry her head high and ignore his existence.

It was incredible to think that at that very instant she was sleeping quietly, without a suspicion of what was awaiting her. Everything was incredible—incredible and impossible. As he looked around the room, in which every book, every photograph, every pen and pencil, was a part of him, he found himself once more straining for a hope, catching at straws. He took a sheet of paper and, sitting down at his desk, began again, for the ten-thousandth time, to balance feverishly his meagre assets against his overwhelming liabilities. He added and subtracted and multiplied and divided with a sort of frenzy, as though by dint of sheer forcing the figures he could make them respond to his will.

Suddenly, with a gesture of mingled anger and hopelessness, he swept the scribbled sheets and all the writing paraphernalia with a crash to the floor, and, burying his face in his hands, gave utterance to a smothered groan. It was a cry, not of surrender, but of protest—of infinite, exasperated protest, of protest against fate and law and judgment and the eternal principles of right and wrong, and against himself most of all. With his head pressed down on the bare polished wood of his desk, he hurled himself mentally at an earth of adamant and a heaven of brass, hurled himself ferociously, repeatedly, with a kind of doggedness, as though he would either break them down or dash his own soul to pieces.

"O God! O God!"

It was an involuntary moan, stifled in his fear of becoming hysterical, but its syllables arrested his attention. They were the syllables of primal articulation, of primal need, condensing the appeal and the aspiration of the world. He repeated them:

"O God! O God!"

He repeated them again. He raised his head, as if listening to a voice.

"O God! O God!"

He continued to sit thus, as if listening.

It was a strange, an astounding thought to him that he might pray. Though the earth of adamant were unyielding, the heaven of brass might give way!

He dragged himself to his feet.

He believed in God—vaguely. That is, it had always been a matter of good form with him to go to church and to call for the offices of religion on occasions of death or marriage. He had assisted at the saying of prayers and assented to their contents. He had even joined in them himself, since a liturgical service was a principle in the church to which he "belonged." All this, however, had seemed remote from his personal affairs, his life-and-death struggles—till now. Now, all at once, queerly, it offered him something—he knew not what. It might be nothing better than any of the straws he had been clutching at. It might be no more than the effort he had just been making to compel two to balance ten.

He stood in the middle of the room under the cluster of electric lights and tried to recollect what he knew, what he had heard, of this Power that could still act when human strength had reached its limitations. It was nothing very definite. It consisted chiefly of great phrases, imperfectly understood: "Father Almighty," "Saviour of the World," "Divine Compassion," and such like. He did not reason about them, or try to formulate what he actually believed. It was instinctively, almost unconsciously, that he began to speak; it was brokenly and with a kind of inward, spiritual hoarseness. He scarcely knew what he was doing when he found himself saying, mentally:

"Save me! . . . I'm helpless! . . . I'm desperate! . . . Save me! . . . Work a miracle! . . . Father! . . . Christ! Christ! Save my daughter! . . . We have no one—but—but You! . . . Work a miracle! Work a miracle! . . . I'm a thief and a liar and a traitor

—but save me! I might do something yet—something that might render me—worth salvation—but then—I might not. . . . Anyhow, save me! . . . O God! Father Almighty! . . . Almighty! That means that You can do anything! . . . Even now—You can do—anything! . . . Save us! . . . Save us all! . . . Christ Christ! Christ!"

He knew neither when nor how he ceased, any more than when or how he began. His most clearly defined impression was that of his spirit coming back from a long way off to take perception of the fact that he was still standing under the cluster of electric lights and the clock was striking three. He was breathless, exhausted. His most urgent physical need was that of air. He strode to the window-door leading out to the terraced lawn, and, throwing it open, passed out into the darkness.

There was no mist at this height above the Charles. The night was still and the moon westering. The light had a glimmering, metallic essence, as from a cosmic mirror in the firmament. Long shadows of trees and shrubbery lay across the grass. Clear in the moonlit foreground stood an elm, the pride of Tory Hill—springing as a single shaft for twice the measure of a man—springing and spreading there into four giant branches, each of which sprang and spread higher into eight—so springing and spreading, springing and spreading still—rounded, symmetrical, superb—till the long outermost shoots fell pendulous, like spray from a fountain of verdure. The silence held the suggestion of mighty spiritual things astir. At least the heaven was not of brass, if the earth continued to be of adamant. On the contrary, the sky was high, soft, dim, star-bestrewn, ineffable. It was spacious; it was free; it was the home of glorious things; it was the medium of the eternal.

He was not reassured; he was not even comforted; what relief he got came only from a feeling—a fancy, perhaps—that the weight had been eased, that he was freed for a minute from the crushing pressure of the

inevitable. It would return again and break him down, but for the moment it was lifted, giving him room and power to breathe. He did breathe—long, deep draughts of the cool night air that brought refreshment and something like strength to struggle on.

He came back into the room. His pens and papers were scattered on the floor, and ink from the overturned inkstand was running out on the Oriental rug. It was the kind of detail that before this evening would have shocked him ; but nothing mattered now. He was too indifferent to lift his hand and put the inkstand back into its place. Instead, he threw himself on a couch, turning his face to the still open window and drinking in with thirsty gasps the blessed revivifying air.

V

GUION awoke in a chill, grey light, to find himself covered with a rug, and his daughter, wrapped in a white dressing-gown, bending above him. Over her shoulder peered the scared face of a maid. His first sensation was that he was cold, his first act to pull the rug more closely about him. His struggle back to waking consciousness was the more confused because of the familiar surroundings of the library.

"Oh, papa, what's the matter ?"

He threw the coverlet from him and dragged himself to a sitting posture.

"What time is it ?" he asked, rubbing his eyes. "I must have dropped off to sleep. Is dinner ready ?"

"It's half-past six in the morning, papa dear. Katie found you here when she came in to dust the room. The window was wide open and all these things strewn about the floor. She put the rug on you and came to wake me. What is it ? What's happened ? Let me send for the doctor."

With his elbow on his knee, he rested his forehead on his hand. The incidents of the night came back to him. Olivia seated herself on the couch beside him an arm across his shoulder.

"I'm cold," was all he said.

"Katie, go and mix something hot—some whisky or brandy and hot water—anything! And you, papa dear, go to bed. I'll call Reynolds and he'll help you."

"I'm cold," he said again.

Rising, he crawled to the mirror into which he had looked last night, shuddering at sight of his own face. The mere fact that he was still in his evening clothes, the white waistcoat wrinkled and the cravat awry, shocked him inexpressibly.

"I'm cold," he said for the third time.

But when he had bathed, dressed, and begun his breakfast, the chill left him. He regained the mastery of his thoughts and the understanding of his position. A certain exaltation of suffering which had upheld him during the previous night failed him, however, now, leaving nothing but a sense of flat, commonplace misery. Thrown into relief by the daylight, the facts were more relentless—not easier of acceptance.

As he drank his coffee and tried to eat, he could feel his daughter watching him from the other end of the table. Now and then he screened himself from her gaze by pretending to skim the morning paper. Once he was startled. Reflected in the glass of a picture hanging on the opposite wall he caught the image of a man in a blue uniform, who mounted the steps and rang the door-bell.

"Who's that?" he asked sharply. He dared not turn round to see.

"It's only the postman, papa, darling. Who else should it be?"

"Yes; of course." He breathed again. "You mustn't mind me, dear. I'm nervous. I'm—I'm not very well."

"I see you're not, papa. I saw it last night. I knew something was wrong."

"There's something—very wrong."

"What is it? Tell me."

Leaning on the table, with clasped hands uplifted, the loose white lace sleeves falling away from her slender wrists, she looked at him pleadingly.

"We've—that is, I've—lost a great deal of money."

"Oh!" The sound was just above her breath. Then after a long silence, she asked: "Is it much?"

He waited before replying, seeking, for the last time, some mitigation of what he had to tell her.

"It's all we have."

"Oh!" It was the same sound as before, just audible—a sound with a little surprise in it, a hint of something awed, but without dismay.

He forced himself to take a few sips of coffee and crumble a bit of toast.

"I don't mind, papa. If that's what's troubling you so much, don't let it any longer. Worse things have happened than that." He gulped down more coffee, not because he wanted it, but to counteract the rising in his throat. "Shall we have to lose Tory Hill?" she asked, after another silence.

He nodded an affirmative, with his head down.

"Then you mean me to understand what you said just now—quite literally. We've lost all we have?"

"When everything is settled," he explained, with an effort, "we shall have nothing at all. It will be worse than that, since I shan't be able to pay all I owe."

"Yes; that *is* worse," she assented quietly.

Another silence was broken by his saying hoarsely—

"You'll get married——"

"That will have to be reconsidered."

"Do you mean—on your part?"

"I suppose I mean—on everybody's part."

"Do you think he would want to—you must excuse

the crudity of the question—do you think he would want to back out?"

"I don't know that I could answer that. It isn't quite to the point. Backing out, as you call it, wouldn't be the process—whatever happened."

He interrupted her nervously. "If this should fall through, dear, you must write to your Aunt Vic. You must eat humble pie. You were too toplofty with her as it was. She'll take you."

"Take me, papa? Why shouldn't I stay with you? I'd much rather."

He tried to explain. It was clearly the moment at which to do it.

"I don't think you understand, dear, how entirely everything has gone to smash. I shall probably—I must say, certainly—I shall have to—to go——"

"I do understand that. But it often happens—especially in this country—that things go to smash, and then the people begin again. There was Lulu Sentner's father. They lost everything they had—and she and her sisters did dressmaking. But he borrowed money, and started in from the beginning, and now they're very well off once more. It's the kind of thing one hears of constantly—in this country."

"You couldn't hear of it in my case, dear, because—well, because I've done all that. I've begun again, and begun again. I've used up all my credit—all my chances. The things I counted on didn't come off. You know that that happens sometimes, don't you?—without anyone being to blame at all?"

She nodded. "I think I've heard so."

"And now," he went on, eager that she should begin to see what he was leading her up to—"and now I couldn't borrow a thousand dollars in all Boston, unless it was from someone who gave it to me as a charity. I've borrowed from everyone—every penny for which I could offer security—and I owe—I owe hundreds of thousands. Do you see now how bad it is?"

"I do see how bad it is, papa. I admit it's worse than I thought. But all the same I know that when people have high reputations other people trust them and help them through. Banks do it, don't they? Isn't that partly what they're for? It was Pierpoint and Hargous who helped Lulu Sentner's father. They stood behind him. She told me so. I'm positive that with your name they'd do as much for you. You take a gloomy outlook because you're ill. But there's no one in Boston—no one in New England—more esteemed or trusted. When one can say, 'All is lost save honour,' then, relatively speaking, there's very little lost at all."

He got up from the table and went to his room. After these words it was physically impossible for him to tell her anything more. He had thought of a means which might bring the fact home to her through the day by a process of suggestion. Packing a small bag with toilet articles and other necessaries, he left it in a conspicuous place.

"I want Reynolds to give it to my messenger in case I send for it," he explained to her, when he had descended to the dining-room again.

She was still sitting where he left her, at the head of the table, pale, pensive, but not otherwise disturbed.

"Does that mean that you're not coming home to-night?"

"I—I don't know. Things may happen to—to prevent me."

"Where should you go?—to New York?"

"No; not to New York."

He half hoped she would press the question, but when she spoke it was only to say—

"I hope you'll try to come home, because I'm sure you're not well. Of course I understand it, now I know you've had so much to upset you. But I wish you'd see Dr. Scott. And, papa," she added, rising, "don't have me on your mind—please don't. I'm quite capable of facing the world without money. You

mayn't believe it, but I am. I could do it—somehow. I'm like you. I've a great deal of self-reliance and a great deal of something else—I don't quite know what —that has never been taxed or called on. It may be pride, but it isn't only pride. Whatever it is, I'm strong enough to bear a lot of trouble. I don't want you to think of me at all in any way that will worry you."

She was making it so hard for him that he kissed her hastily and went away. Her further enlightenment was one more detail that he must leave, as he had left so much else, to fate or God to take care of. For the present he himself had all he could attend to.

Half-way to the gate he turned to take what might prove his last look at the old house. It stood on the summit of a low, rounded hill, on the site made historic as the country residence of Governor Rodney. Governor Rodney's "Mansion" having been sacked in the Revolution by his fellow-townsmen, the neighbourhood fell for a time into disrepute under the contemptuous nickname of Tory Hill. On the restoration of order the property passed by purchase to the Guions, in whose hands, with a continuity not customary in America, it had remained. The present house, built by Andrew Guion, on the foundations of the Rodney Mansion, in the early nineteenth century, was old enough according to New England standards to be venerable; and, though most of the ground originally about it had long ago been sold off in building-lots, enough remained to give an impression of ample outdoor space. Against the blue of the October morning sky the house, with its dignified Georgian lines, was not without a certain stateliness—rectangular, three-storied, mellow, with buff walls, buff chimneys, white doorways, white casements, white verandas, a white balustrade around the top, and a white urn at each of the four corners. Where, as over the verandas, there was a bit of inclined roof, russet-red tiles gave a warmer touch of colour. From the borders of the lawn, edged with a line of shrubs, the town of

Waverton, merging into Cambridge, just now a stretch of crimson-and-orange woodland, where gables, spires, and towers peeped above the trees, sloped gently to the ribbon of the Charles. Far away, and dim in the morning haze, the roofed and steepled crest of Beacon Hill rose in successive ridges, to cast up from its highest point the gilded dome of the State House as culmination to the sky-line. Guion looked long and hard, first at the house, then at the prospect. He walked on only when he remembered that he must reserve his forces for the day's possibilities, that he must not drain himself of emotion in advance. If what he expected were to come to pass, the first essential to his playing the man at all would lie in his keeping cool.

So, on reaching his office, he brought all his knowledge of the world into play, to appear without undue self-consciousness before his stenographer, his book-keeper, and his clerks. The ordeal was the more severe because of his belief that they were conversant with the state of his affairs. At least they knew enough to be sorry for him—of that he was sure; though there was nothing on this particular morning to display the sympathy, unless it was the stenographer's smile as he passed her in the ante-room, and the three small yellow chrysanthemums she had placed in a glass on his desk. In the nods of greeting between him and the men there was, or there seemed to be, a studied effort to show nothing at all.

Once safely in his own office, he shut the door with a sense of relief in the seclusion. It crossed his mind that he should feel something of the same sort when locked in the privacy of his cell after the hideous publicity of the trial. From habit as well as from anxiety he went straight to a mirror and surveyed himself again. Decidedly he had changed since yesterday. It was not so much that he was older or more careworn—he was different. Perhaps he was ill. He felt well enough, except for being tired, desperately tired; but that could be accounted for by the way in which he had spent the

night. He noticed chiefly the ashy tint of his skin, the dulness of his eyes, and—notwithstanding the fact that his clothes were of his ususal fastidiousness—a curious effect of being badly dressed more startling to him than pain. He was careful to brush his beard and twist his long moustache into its usual upward, French-looking curve, so as to regain as much as possible the air of his old self, before seating himself at his desk to look over his correspondence. There was a pile of letters, of which he read the addresses slowly without opening any of them.

What was the use? He could do nothing. He had come to the end. He had exhausted all the possibilities of the situation. Besides, his spirit was broken. He could feel it. Something had snapped last night within him that would never be whole, never even be mended, again. It was not only the material resources under his control that he had overtaxed, but the spring of energy within himself, leaving him no more power of resilience.

An hour may have passed in this condition of dull suspense, when he was startled by the tinkle of his desk telephone. It was with some effort that he leaned forward to answer the call. Not that he was afraid—now; he only shrank from the necessity of doing anything.

"Mr. Davenant would like to see you," came the voice of the stenographer from the ante-room.

There was nothing to reply but "Ask Mr. Davenant to come in." He uttered the words mechanically. He had not thought of Davenant since he talked with Olivia on the stairs—a conversation that now seemed a curiously long time ago.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you, Mr Guion," the visitor said apologetically, with a glance at the letters on the desk.

"Not at all, my dear fellow," Guion said cordially, from force of habit, offering his hand without rising from

the revolving chair. "Sit down. Have a cigar. It's rather a sharp morning for the time of year."

The use of the conventional phrases of welcome helped him to emerge somewhat from his state of apathy. Davenant declined the cigar, but seated himself near the desk, in one of the round-backed office chairs. Not being a man easily embarrassed by silences, he did not begin to speak at once, and during the minute his hesitation lasted Guion bethought him of Olivia's remark, 'That sort of Saxon-giant type is always good-looking." Davenant *was* good-looking, in a clear-skinned, clear-eyed way. Everything about him spoke of straightforwardness and strength, tempered perhaps by the boyish quality inseparable from fair hair, a clean, healthily ruddy complexion, and a direct blue glance that rested on men and things with a kind of pensive wondering. All the same, the heavy-browed face on a big, tense neck had a frowning, perhaps a lowering expression that reminded Guion of a young bull before it begins to charge. The lips beneath the fair moustache might be too tightly and too severely compressed, but the smile into which they broke over regular white teeth was the franker and the more engaging because of the unexpected light. If there was any physical awkwardness about him it was in the management of his long legs, but that difficulty was overcome by his simplicity. It was characteristic of Guion to notice even at such a time as this, that Davenant was carefully and correctly dressed, like a man respectful of social usages.

"I came in to see you Mr. Guion," he began, apparently with some hesitation, "about what we were talking of last night."

Guion pulled himself together. His handsome eyebrows arched themselves, and he half smiled.

"Last night? What *were* we talking of!"

"We weren't talking of it, exactly. You only told us."

"Only told you—what?" The necessity to do a

little fencing brought some of his old powers into play.

"That you wanted to borrow half a million dollars. I've come in to—to lend you that sum—if you'll take it."

For a few seconds Guion sat rigidly still, looking at his man. The import and bearing of the words were too much for him to grasp at once. All his mind was prepared to deal with on the spur of the moment was the fact of this offer, ignoring its application and its consequences as things which for the moment lay outside his range of thought.

As far as he was able to reflect, it was to assume that there was more here than met the eye. Davenant was too practised as a player of "the game" to pay a big price for a broken potsherd, unless he was tolerably sure in advance that within the potsherd or under it there lay more than its value. It was not easy to surmise the form of the treasure nor the spot where it was hidden, but that it was there—in kind satisfactory to Davenant himself—Guion had no doubt. It was his part, therefore, to be astute and wary, not to lose the chance of selling, and yet not to allow himself to be overreached. If Davenant was playing a deep game, he must play a deeper. He was sorry his head ached and that he felt in such poor trim for making the effort. "I must look sharp," he said to himself; "and yet I must be square and courteous. That's the line for me to take." He tried to get some inspiration for the spurt in telling himself that in spite of everything he was still a man of business. When at last he began to speak, it was with something of the feeling of the broken-down prize-fighter dragging himself bleeding and breathless into the ring for the last round with a young and still unspent opponent.

"I didn't suppose you were in —in a position—to do that."

"I am." Davenant nodded with some emphasis.

"Did you think that that was what I meant when I—I opened my heart to you last night?"

"No. I know it wasn't. My offer is inspired by nothing but what I feel."

"Good!" It was some minutes before Guion spoke again. "If I remember rightly," he observed then, "I said I would sell my soul for half a million dollars. I didn't say I wanted to borrow that amount."

"You may put it in any way you like," Davenant smiled. "I've come with the offer of the money. I want you to have it. The terms on which you'd take it don't matter to me."

"But they do to me. Don't you see? I'd borrow the money if I could. I couldn't accept it in any other way. And I can't borrow it. I couldn't pay the interest on it if I did. But I've exhausted my credit. I can't borrow any more."

"You can borrow what I'm willing to lend, can't you?"

"No; because Tory Hill is mortgaged for all it will stand. I've nothing else to offer as collateral——"

"I'm not asking for collateral. I'm ready to hand you over the money on any terms you like or on no terms at all."

"Do you mean that you'd be willing to—to—to *give* it to me?"

"I mean, sir," he explained, reddening a little, "that I want you to have the money to *use*—now. We could talk about the conditions afterward and call them what you please. If I understood you correctly last night, you're in a tight place—a confoundedly tight place——"

"I am; but—don't be offended!—it seems to me you'd put me in a tighter."

"How's that?"

"It's a little difficult to explain." He leaned forward, with one of his nervous jerky movements, and fingered the glass containing the three chrysanthemums, but without taking his eyes from Davenant. So far he was quite satisfied with himself. "You see, it's this way. I've done wrong—very wrong. We needn't go

into that, because you know it as well as I. But I'm willing to pay the penalty. That is, I'm *ready* to pay the penalty. I've made up my mind to it. I've had to—of course. But if I accepted your offer, you'd be paying it, not I."

"Well, why shouldn't I? I've paid other people's debts before now—once or twice—when I didn't want to. Why shouldn't I pay yours, when I should like the job?"

Davenant attempted, by taking something like a jovial tone, to carry the thing off lightly.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't do it; there's only a reason why I shouldn't let you."

"I don't see why you shouldn't let me. It mayn't be just what you'd like, but it's surely better than—than what you wouldn't like at all."

Taking in the significance of these words, Guion coloured, not with the healthy young flush that came so readily to Davenant's face, but in dabbled, hectic spots. His hand trembled, too, so that some of the water from the vase he was holding spilled over on the desk. It was probably this small accident making him forget the importance of his rôle that caused him to jump up nervously and begin pacing about the room.

Davenant noticed then what he had not yet had time for—the change that had taken place in Guion in less than twenty hours. It could not be defined as looking older or haggard or ill. It could hardly be said to be a difference in complexion or feature or anything outward. As far as Davenant was able to judge, it was probably due, not to the loss of self-respect, but to the loss of the pretence at self-respect; it was due to that desolation of the personality that comes when the soul has no more reason to keep up its defences against the world outside it, when the Beautiful Gate is battered down and the Veil of the Temple rent, while the Holy of Holies lies open for any eye to rifle. It was probably because this was so that Guion, on coming back to his

seat, began at once to be more explanatory than there was any need for.

"I haven't tried to thank you for your kind suggestion, but we'll come to that when I see more clearly just what you want."

"I've told you that. I'm not asking for anything else."

"So far you haven't asked for anything at all; but I don't imagine you'll be content with that. In any case," he hurried on, as Davenant seemed about to speak, "I don't want you to be under any misapprehension about the affair. There's nothing extenuating in it whatever—that is, nothing but the intention to 'put it back' that goes with practically every instance of"—he hesitated long—"every instance of embezzlement," he finished bravely. "It began this way——"

"I don't want to know how it began," Davenant said hastily. "I'm satisfied with knowing the situation as it is."

"But I want to tell you. In proportion as I'm open with you I shall expect you to be frank with me."

"I don't promise to be frank with you."

"Anyhow, I mean to set you the example."

He went on to speak rapidly, feverishly, with that half-hysterical impulse toward confession from the signs of which Davenant had shrunk on the previous evening. As Guion himself had forewarned, there was nothing new or unusual in the tale. The situations were entirely the conventional ones in the drama of this kind of unfaithfulness. The only element to make it appealing, an element forcibly present to Davenant's protective instincts, was the contrast between what Guion had been and what he was to-day.

"And so," Guion concluded, "I don't see how I could accept this money from you. Any honourable man—that is," he corrected, in some confusion, "any *sane* man—would tell you as much."

"I've already considered what the sane man and the

honourable man would tell me. I guess I can let them stick to their opinion so long as I have my own."

"And what *is* your opinion? Do you mind telling me? You understand that what you're proposing is immoral, don't you?"

"Yes—in a way."

Guion frowned. He had hoped for some pretence at contradiction.

"I didn't know whether you'd thought of that."

"Oh, yes, I've thought of it. That is, I see what you mean."

"It's compounding a felony and outwitting the ends of justice and——"

"I guess I'll do it just the same. It doesn't seem to be my special job to look after the ends of justice; and as for compounding a felony—well, it'll be something new."

Guion made a show of looking at him sharply. The effort, or the pretended effort, to see through Davenant's game disguised for the moment his sense of humiliation at this prompt acceptance of his own statement of the case.

"All the same," he observed, trying to take a detached, judicial tone. "your offer is so amazing that I presume you wouldn't make it unless you had some unusual reason."

"I don't know that I have. In fact, I know I haven't."

"Well, whatever its nature, I should like to know what it is."

"Is that necessary?"

"Doesn't it strike you that it would be—in order? If I were to let you do this for me you'd be rendering me an extraordinary service. We're both men of business, men of the world; and we know that something for nothing is not according to Hoyle."

Davenant looked at him pensively. "That is. you want to know what I should be pulling off for myself?"

"That's about it."

"I don't see why that should worry you. If you get the money——"

"If I get the money I put myself in your power."

"What of that? Isn't it just as well to be in my power as in the power of other people?"

Again Guion winced inwardly, but kept his self-control. He was not yet accustomed to doing without the formulas of respect from those whom he considered his inferiors.

"Possibly," he said, not caring to conceal a certain irritation; "but even so I should like to know in case I *were* in your power what you'd expect of me."

"I can answer that question right away. I shouldn't expect anything at all."

"Then you leave me more in the dark then ever."

Davenant still eyed him pensively. "Do I understand you to be suspicious of my motives?"

"Suspicious might not be the right word. Suppose we said curious."

Davenant reflected. Perhaps it was his mastery of the situation that gave him unconsciously a rock-like air of nonchalance. When he spoke it was with a little smile, which Guion took to be one of condescension. Condescension in the circumstances was synonymous with insolence.

"Well, sir, suppose I allowed you to remain curious? What then?"

They were the wrong words. It was the wrong manner. Guion looked up with a start His next words were uttered in the blind instinct of the haughty-headed gentleman who thinks highly of himself to save the moment's dignity.

"In that case I think we must call the bargain off."

Davenant shot out of his seat. He, too, was not without a current of hot blood.

"All right, sir. It's for you to decide. Only, I'm sorry. Good-bye!" He held out his hand, which Guion,

who was now leaning forward, toying with the pens and pencils on the desk, affected not to see. A certain lack of ease that often came over Davenant at moments of leave-taking or greeting kept him on the spot. "I hoped," he stammered, "that I might have been of some use to you, and that Miss Guion——"

Guion looked up sharply. "Has *she* got anything to do with it?"

"Nothing," Davenant said quickly, "nothing whatever."

"I didn't see how she *could* have——" Guion was going on, when Davenant interrupted.

"She has nothing to do with it whatever," he repeated. "I was only going to say that I hoped she might have got through her wedding without hearing anything about —all this—all this fuss."

In uttering the last words he had moved towards the door. His hand was on the knob and he was about to make some repetition of his farewells when Guion spoke again. He was leaning once more over the desk, his fingers playing nervously with the pens and pencils. He made no further effort to keep up his rôle of keen-sighted man of business. His head was bent, so that Davenant could scarcely see his face, and when he spoke his words were muffled and sullen.

"Half a million would be too much. Four hundred and fifty thousand would cover everything."

"That would be all the same to me." Davenant said in a matter-of-fact tone.

But he went back to the desk and took his seat again.

VI

HAVING watched through the window her father pass down the avenue on his way to town, Miss Guion reseated herself mechanically in her place at the breakfast-table in order to think. Not that her

thought could be active or coherent as yet ; but a certain absorption of the facts was possible by the simple process of sitting still and letting them sink in. As the minutes went by, it became with her a matter of sensation rather than of mental effort—of odd, dream-like sensation, in which all the protecting walls and clearly defined boundary-lines of life and conduct appeared to be melting away, leaving an immeasurable outlook on vacancy. To pass abruptly from the command of means, dignity, and consideration out into a state in which she could claim nothing at all was not unlike what she had often supposed it might be to go from the pomp and circumstance of earth as a disembodied spirit into space. The analogy was rendered the more exact by her sense, stunned and yet conscious, of the survival of her own personality amid what seemed a universal wreckage. This persistence of the ego in conditions so vast and vague and empty as to be almost no conditions at all was the one point on which she could concentrate her faculties.

It was, too, the one point on which she could form an articulated thought. She was Olivia Guion still! In this slipping of the world from beneath her feet she got a certain assurance from the affirmation of her identity. She was still that character, compounded of many elements, which recognised as its most active energies insistence of will and tenacity of pride. She could still call these resources to her aid to render her indestructible. Sitting slightly crouched, her hands clasped between her knees, her face drawn and momentarily older, her lips set, her eyes tracing absently the arabesques chased on the coffee-urn, she was inwardly urging her spirit to the buoyancy that cannot sink, to the vitality that rides on chaos. She was not actively or consciously doing this ; in the strictest sense she was not doing it at all ; it was doing itself, obscurely and spontaneously, by the operation of subliminal forces of which she knew almost nothing, and to which her personality bore no more than

the relation of a mountain range to unrecorded volcanic fusions deep down in the earth.

When, after long withdrawal within herself, she changed her position, sighed, and glanced about her, she had a curious feeling of having travelled far, of looking back on the old familiar things from a long way off The richly wrought silver, the cheerful Minton, the splendidly toned mahogany, the Goya etchings on the walls, things of no great value, but long ago acquired, treasured, loved, had suddenly become useless and irrelevant. She had not lost Tory Hill so much as passed beyond it—out into a condition where nothing that preceded it could count, and in which so far as she was concerned, existence would have to be a new creation, called afresh out of that which was without form and void.

She experienced the same sensation, if it *was* a sensation, when, a half-hour later, she found herself roaming dreamily rather than restlessly about the house. She was not anticipating her farewell of it ; it had only ceased to be a background, to have a meaning ; it was like the scenery, painted and set, after the play is done. She herself had been removed elsewhere, projected into a sphere where the signs and seasons were so different from anything she had ever known as to afford no indications—where day did not necessarily induce light, nor night darkness, nor past experience knowledge. In the confounding of the perceptive powers and the reeling of the judgment which the new circumstances produced, she clung to her capacity to survive and dominate like a staggered man to a stanchion.

In the meantime she was not positively suffering from either shock or sorrow. From her personal point of view the loss of money was not of itself an overpowering calamity. It might entail the disruption of lifelong habits, but she was young enough not to be afraid of that. In spite of a way of living that might be said to have given her the best of everything, she had always

known that her father's income was a small one for his position in the world. As a family they had been in the habit of associating on both sides of the Atlantic, with people whose revenues were twice and thrice and ten times their own. The obligation to keep the pace set by their equals had been recognized as a domestic hardship ever since she could remember, though it was a mitigating circumstance that in one way or another the money had always been found. Guion, Maxwell & Guion was a well which, while often threatening to run dry, had never failed to respond to a sufficiently energetic pumping. She had known the thought, however—fugitive, speculatory, not dwelt upon as a real possibility—that a day might come when it would do so no more.

It was a thought that went as quickly as it came, its only importance being that it never caused her a shudder. If it sometimes brought matter for reflection, it was in showing her to herself in a light in which, she was tolerably sure, she never appeared to anybody else—as the true child of the line of frugal forbears, of sea-scouring men and cheeseparing women, who, during nearly two hundred years of thrift, had put penny to penny to save the Guion competence. Standing in the cheerful "Colonial" hall which their stinting of themselves had made it possible to build, and which was still furnished chiefly with the objects—a settle, a pair of cupboards, a Copley portrait, a few chairs, some old decorative pottery—they had lived with, it afforded one more steadying element for her bewilderment to grasp at, to feel herself their daughter.

There was, indeed, in the type of her beauty a hint of a carefully calculated, unwasteful adaption of means to ends quite in the spirit of their sparing ways. It was a beauty achieved by nature apparently with the surest, and yet with the slightest, expenditure of energy—a beauty of poise, of line, of delicacy, of reserve—with nothing of the superfluous, and little even of colour,

beyond a gleam of chrysoprase in fine grey eyes and a coppery, metallic lustre in hair that otherwise would have passed as chestnut brown. It was a beauty that came as much from repose in inaction as from grace in movement, but of which a noticeable trait was that it required no more to produce it in the way of effort than in that of artifice. Through the transparent whiteness of the skin the blue of each clearly articulated vein and the rose of each hurrying flush counted for its utmost in the general economy of values.

It was in keeping with this restraint that in all her ways, her manners, her dress, her speech, her pride, there should be a meticulous simplicity. It was not the simplicity of the hedgerow any more than of the hot-house ; it was rather that of some classic flower, lavender or crown-imperial, growing from an ancient stock in some dignified, long-tended garden. It was thus a simplicity closely allied to sturdiness—the inner sturdiness not inconsistent with an outward semblance of fragility —the tenacity of strength by which the lavender scents the summer and the crown-imperial adorns the spring, after the severest snows.

It was doubtless this vitality, drawn from deep down in her native soil, that braced her now to simply holding fast intuitively and almost blindly till the first force of the shock should have so spent itself that the normal working of the faculties might begin again. It was the something of which she had just spoken to her father—the something that might be pride but that was not wholly pride, which had never been taxed nor called on. She could not have defined it in a more positive degree ; but even now, when all was confusion and disintegration, she was conscious of its being there, an untouched treasure of resources.

In what it supplied her with, however, there was no answer to the question that had been silently making itself urgent from the first word of her father's revelations : What was to happen with regard to her wedding ?

It took the practical form of dealing with the mere outward paraphernalia—the service, the bridesmaids, the guests, the feast. Would it be reasonable, would it be decent, to carry out rich and elaborate plans in a ruined house? Further than that she dared not inquire, though she knew very well there was still a greater question to be met. When, during the course of the morning, Drusilla Fane came to see her, Olivia broached it timidly, though the conversation brought her little in the way of help.

Knowing all she knew through the gossip of servants, Drusilla felt the necessity of being on her guard. She accepted Olivia's information that her father had met with losses as so much news, and gave utterance to sentiments of sympathy and encouragement. Beyond that she could not go. She was obliged to cast her condolences in the form of bald generalities, since she could make but a limited use of the name of Rupert Ashley as a source of comfort. More clearly than anyone in their little group she could see what marriage with Olivia in her new conditions—the horrible, tragic conditions that would arise if Peter could do nothing—would mean for him. She weighed her words, therefore, with an exactness such as she had not displayed since her early days among the Sussex Rifles, measuring the little more and the little less as in an apothecary's balances.

"You see," Olivia said, trying to sound her friend's ideas, "from one point of view I scarcely know him."

"You know him well enough to be in love with him." Drusilla felt that that committed her to nothing.

"That doesn't imply much—not necessarily, that is. You can be in love with people and scarcely know them at all. And it often happens that if you knew them better you wouldn't be in love with them."

"And you know him well enough to be sure that he'll want to do everything right."

"Oh yes; I'm sure quite of that. I'm only uncertain that—everything right—would satisfy me."

Drusilla reflected. "I see what you mean. And, of course, you want to do—everything right—yourself."

Olivia glanced up obliquely under her lashes.

"I see what *you* mean too."

"You mustn't see too much." Drusilla spoke hastily. She waited in some anxiety to see just what significance Olivia had taken from her words; but when the latter spoke it was to pass on to another point.

"You see, he didn't want to marry an American, in the first place."

"Well, no one forced him into that. That's one thing he did with his eyes open, at any rate."

"His doing it was a sort of—concession."

Drusilla looked at her with big, indignant eyes.

"Concession to what, for pity's sake?"

"Concession to his own heart, I suppose." Olivia smiled faintly. "You see, all other things being equal, he would have preferred to marry one of his own countrywomen."

"It's six of one and half a dozen of the other. If he'd married one of his own countrywomen, the other things wouldn't have been equal. So there you are."

"But the other things aren't equal now. Don't you see? They're changed."

"*You're* not changed." Drusilla felt these words to be dangerous. It was a relief to her that Olivia should contradict them promptly.

"Oh yes, I am. I'm changed—in value. With papa's troubles there's a depreciation in everything we are."

Drusilla repeated these words to her father and mother at table when she went home to luncheon. "If she feels like that now," she commented, "what *will* she say when she knows all?—if she ever has to know it."

"But she hasn't changed," Mrs. Temple argued. "It doesn't make any difference in *her*."

Drusilla shook her head. "Yes, it does, mother dear. You don't know anything about it."

"I know enough about it," Mrs. Temple declared, with some asperity, "to see that she will be the same Olivia Guion after her father has gone to prison as she was in the days of her happiness. If there's any change, it will be to make her a better and nobler character. She's just the type to be—to be perfected through suffering."

"Y-y-es," Drusilla admitted, her head inclined to one side. "That might be quite true in one way; but it wouldn't help Rupert Ashley to keep his place in the Sussex Rifles."

"Do you mean to say they'd make him give it up?"

"They wouldn't make him, mother dear. He'd only have to."

"Well, I never did! If that's the British Army——"

"The British Army is a very complicated institution. It fills a lot of different functions, and it's a lot of different things. It's one thing from the point of view of the regiment and another from that of the War Office. It's one thing on the official side, and another on the military, and another on the social. You can't decide anything about it in an abstract, offhand way. Rupert Ashley might be a capital officer, and every one might say he'd done the honourable thing in standing by Olivia; and yet he'd find it impossible to go on as colonel of the Rifles when his father-in-law was in penal servitude. There it is in a nutshell. You can't argue about it, because that's the way it is."

Rodney Temple said nothing; but he probably had these words in his mind when he, too, early in the afternoon, made his way to Tory Hill. Olivia spoke to him of her father's losses, though her allusions to Colonel Ashley were necessarily more veiled than they had been with Mrs. Fane.

"The future may be quite different from what I expected. I can't tell yet for sure. I must see how things—work out."

"That's a very good way, my dear," the old man com-

mended. "It's a large part of knowledge to know how to leave well enough alone. Nine times out of ten life works out better by itself than we can make it."

"I know I've got to feel my way," she said, meaning to agree with him.

"I don't see why."

She raised her eyebrows in some surprise. "You don't see——?"

"No, I don't. Why should you feel your way? You're not blind."

"I feel my way because I don't see it."

"Oh yes, you do——all you need to see."

"But I don't see any. I assure you it's all confusion."

"Not a bit, my dear. It's as plain as a pikestaff—for the next step."

"I don't know what you mean by the next step."

"I suppose the next step would be—well, let us say, what you've got to do to-day. That's about as much ground as anyone can cover with a stride. You see that, don't you? You've got to eat your dinner and go to bed. That's all you've got to settle for the moment."

Her lips relaxed in a pale smile. "I'm afraid I must look a little farther ahead than that."

"What for? What good will it do? You won't see anything straight. It's no use trying to see daylight two hours before dawn. People are foolish enough sometimes to make the attempt, but they only strain their eyesight. For every step you've got to take there'll be something to show you the line to follow."

"What?" She asked the question chiefly for the sake of humouring him. She was not susceptible to this kind of comfort, nor did she feel the need of it.

"W-well," the old man answered slowly, "it isn't easy to tell you in any language you'd understand."

"I can understand plain English, if that would do."

"You can make it do, but it doesn't do very well. It's really one of those things that require what the

primitive Christians called an unknown tongue. Since we haven't got that as a means of communication——" He broke off, stroking his long beard with a big handsome hand, but presently began again. "Some people call it a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Some people have described it by other figures of speech. The description isn't of importance—it's the *Thing*."

She waited a minute before saying in a tone that had some awe in it, as well as some impatience: "Oh, but I've never seen anything like that. I never expect to."

"That's a pity; because it's there."

"There? Where?"

"Just where one would look for it—if one looked at all. When it moves," he went on, his hand suiting the action to the word, on a level with his eyes, "when it moves, you follow it, and when it rests you wait. It's possible—I don't know—I merely throw out the suggestion—no one can really *know* but yourself, because no one but yourself can see it—but it's possible that at this moment—for you—it's standing still."

"I don't know what I gain either by its moving or its standing still, so long as I don't see it."

"No, neither do I," he assented promptly.

"Well, then?" she questioned.

"Shall I tell you a little story?" He smiled at her behind his stringy, sandy beard, while his kind old eyes blinked wistfully.

"If you like. I shall be happy to hear it." She was not enthusiastic. She was too deeply engrossed with pressing, practical questions to find his mysticism greatly to the point.

He took a turn around the drawing-room before beginning, stopping to caress the glaze of one of the K'anghsi vases on the mantelpiece, while he arranged his thoughts.

"There was once a little people," he began, turning round to where she sat in the corner of a sofa, her hands

clasped in her lap—"there was once a little people—a mere handful, who afterwards became a race—who saw the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, and followed it. That is to say, some of them certainly saw it, enough of them to lead the others on. For a generation or two they were little more than a band of nomads; but at last they came to a land where they fought and conquered and settled down."

"Yes? I seem to have heard of them. Please go on."

"It was a little land, rather curiously situated between the Orient and the West, between the desert and the sea. It had great advantages both for seclusion within itself and communication with the world outside. If a divine power had wanted to nourish a tender shoot, till it grew strong enough to ripen seed that would blow readily into every corner of the globe, it probably couldn't have done better than to have planted it just there."

She nodded, to show that she followed him.

"But this little land had also the dangers attendant on its advantages. To the north of it there developed a great Power; to the south of it another. Each turned greedy eyes on the little buffer State. And the little buffer State began to be very wise and politic and energetic. It said, 'If we don't begin to take active measures, the Assyrian, or the Egyptian, whoever gets here first, will eat us up. But if we buy off the one, he will protect us against the other.'"

"That seems reasonable."

"Yes; quite reasonable; too reasonable. They forgot that a power that could lead them by fire and cloud could protect them even against conscript troops and modern methods of fighting. They forgot that if so much trouble had been taken to put them where they were, it was not that—assuming that they behaved themselves—it was not that they might be easily rooted out. Instead of having confidence within, they looked for an ally from without, and chose Egypt. Very

clever ; very diplomatic. There was only one criticism to be made on the course taken—that it was all wrong. There was a man on the spot to tell them so—one of those fellows whom we should call pessimists if we hadn't been taught to speak of them as prophets. 'You are carrying your riches,' he cried to them, 'on the shoulders of young asses, and your treasures on the bunches of camels, to a people that shall not profit you. For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose. Your strength is—*to sit still!*'" As he stood looking down at her his kindly eyes blinked for a minute longer, before he added, "Do you see the point?"

She smiled and nodded. "Yes. It isn't very obscure. Otherwise expressed it might be, When in doubt, do nothing."

"Exactly ; do nothing—till the pillar of cloud begins to move."

Out of the old man's parable she extracted just one hint that she considered useful. In the letter which she proceeded to write Rupert Ashley as soon as she was alone, a letter that would meet him on his arrival in New York, she gave a statement of such facts as had come to her knowledge, but abstained from comments of her own, and from suggestions. She had intended to make both. She had thought it at first her duty to take the initiative in pointing out the gulf of difficulties that had suddenly opened up between her lover and herself. It occurred to her now that she might possibly discern the leading of the pillar of cloud from self-betrayal on his part. She would note carefully his acts, his words, the expressions of his face. She had little doubt of being able to read in them some indication of her duty. This in itself was a relief. It was like being able to learn a language instead of having to invent one. Nevertheless, as she finished her letter she was impelled to add :

"We have asked some three hundred people to the church for the 28th. Many of them will not be in town.

as the season is still so early; but I think it wisest to withdraw all invitations without consulting you farther. This will leave us free to do as we think best after you arrive. We can then talk over everything from the beginning."

With the hint thus conveyed she felt her letter to be discreetly worded. By the time she had slipped down the driveway to the box at the gate and posted it with her own hands her father had returned.

She had ordered tea in the little oval sitting-room they used when quite alone, and told the maid to say she was not receiving if anybody called. She knew her father would be tired, but she hoped that if they were undisturbed he would talk to her of his affairs. There was so much in them that was mysterious to her. Notwithstanding her partial recovery from the shock of the morning, she still felt herself transported to a world in which the needs were new to her, and the chain of cause and effect had a bewildering inconsequence. For this reason it seemed to her quite in the order of things—the curiously inverted order now established, in which one thing was as likely as another—that her father should stretch himself in a comfortable arm-chair and say nothing at all till after he had finished his second cup of tea. Even then he might not have spoken if her own patience had held out.

"So you didn't go away after all," she felt it safe to observe.

"No, I didn't."

"Shan't you *have* to go?"

There was an instant's hesitation.

"Perhaps not. In fact—I may almost definitely say —*not*. I should like another cup of tea."

"That makes three, papa. Won't it keep you awake?"

"Nothing will keep me awake to-night."

The tone caused her to look at him more closely as she took the cup he handed back to her. She noticed

that his eyes glittered and that in either cheek, above the line of the beard, there was a hectic spot. She adjusted the spirit-lamp, and, lifting the cover of the kettle, looked inside.

"Has anything happened?" she asked, doing her best to give the question a casual intonation.

"A great deal has happened." He allowed that statement to sink in before continuing. "I think"—he paused long—"I think I'm going to get the money."

She held herself well in hand, though at the words the old familiar landmarks of her former world seemed to rise again, rosily, mistily, like the walls of Troy to the sound of Apollo's lute. She looked into the kettle again to see if the water was yet boiling, taking longer than necessary to peer into the quiet depth.

"I'm so glad." She spoke as if he had told her he had shaken hands with an old friend. "I thought you would."

"Ah, but you never thought of anything like this."

"I knew it would be something pretty good. With your name, there wasn't the slightest doubt of it."

Had he been a wise man he would have let it go at that. He was not, however, a wise man. The shallow, brimming reservoir of his nature was of the kind that spills over at a splash.

"The most extraordinary thing has happened," he went on. "A man came to my office to-day and offered to lend me—no, not to lend—practically to *give* me—enough money to pull me through."

She held a lump of sugar poised above his cup with the sugar-tongs. Her astonishment was so great that she kept it there. The walls of the city which just now had seemed to be rising magically faded away again, leaving the same unbounded vacancy into which she had been looking out all day.

"What do you mean by—practically to give you?"

"The man said lend. But my name is good for even

more than you supposed, since he knows, and I know, that I can offer him no security."

"How can he tell, then, that you'll ever pay it back?"

"He can't tell. That's just it."

"And can you tell?" She let the lump of sugar fall with a circle of tiny eddies into the cup of tea.

"I can tell—up to a point." His tone indicated some abatement of enthusiasm.

"Up to what point?"

"Up to the point that I'll pay it back—if I can. That's all he asks. As a matter of fact, he doesn't seem to care."

She handed him his cup. "Isn't that a very queer way to lend money?"

"Of course it's queer. That's why I'm telling you. That's what makes it so remarkable—such a—tribute—to me. I dare say that sounds fatuous, but——"

"It doesn't sound fatuous so much as——"

"So much as what?"

The distress gathering in her eyes prepared him for her next words before she uttered them.

"Papa, I shouldn't think you'd take it."

He stared at her dully. Her perspicacity disconcerted him. He had expected to bolster up the ruins of his honour by her delighted acquiescence. He had not known till now how much he had been counting on the justification of her relief. It was a proof, however, of the degree to which his own initiative had failed him that he cowered before her judgment, with little or no protest.

"I haven't said I'd take it—positively."

"Naturally. Of course you haven't."

He dabbled the spoon uneasily in his tea, looking downcast. "I don't quite see that," he objected, trying to rally his pluck, "why it should be—naturally."

"Oh, don't you? To me it's self-evident. We may have lost money, but we're still not—recipients of alms."

"This wasn't alms. It was four hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

She was plainly awe-struck. "That's a great deal; but I supposed it would be something large. And yet the magnitude of the sum only makes it the more impossible to accept."

"Y-es; of course—if you look at it in that way." He put back his cup on the table untasted.

"Surely it's the only way to look at it? Aren't you going to drink your tea?"

"No, I think not. I've had enough. I've—I've had enough—of everything."

He sank back wearily into the depths of his arm-chair. The glitter had passed from his eyes; he looked ill. He had clearly not enough courage to make a stand for what he wanted. She could see how cruelly he was disappointed. After all, he might have accepted the money and told her nothing about it! He had taken her into his confidence because of that need of expansion that had often led him to "give away" what a more crafty man would have kept to himself. She was profiting by his indiscretion to make what was already so hard for him still harder. Sipping her tea slowly, she turned the subject over and over in her mind, seeking some ground on which to agree with him.

She did this the more conscientiously, since she had often reproached herself with a fixity of principle that might with some show of reason be called too inflexible. Between right and wrong other people, especially the people of her "world," were able to see an infinitude of shadings she had never been able to distinguish. She half accepted the criticism often made of her in Paris and London that her Puritan inheritance had given an inartistic rigidty, to her moral prospect. It inclined her to see the paths of life as ruled and numbered like the chequer-board plan of an American city instead of twisting and winding, quaintly and picturesquely,

with roundabout evasions and astonishing short-cuts, amusing to explore, whether for the finding or the losing of the way, as in any of the capitals long trodden by the feet of men. Between the straight, broad avenues of conduct, well lighted and well defined, there lay apparently whole regions of byways, in which those who could not easily do right could wander vaguely, without precisely doing wrong, following a line that might be termed permissible. Into this tortuous maze her spirit now tried to penetrate, as occasionally, to visit some historic monument, she had plunged into the slums of a mediæval town.

It was an exercise that brought her nothing but a feeling of bewilderment. Having no sense of locality for this kind of labyrinth, she could only turn round and round confusedly. All she could do, when from the drooping of her father's lids she feared he was falling off to sleep, leaving the question unsettled, was to say, helplessly:

"I suppose you'll be sorry now for having told me."

He lifted his long lashes, that were like a girl's, and looked at her. The minutes that had passed had altered his expression. There was again a sparkle of resolve, perhaps of relief, in his glance. Without changing his position, he spoke drowsily, and yet reassuringly, like a man with a large and easy grasp of the situation. She was not sure whether it was a renewal of confidence on his part or a bit of acting.

"No, dear, no. I wanted to get your point of view. It's always interesting to me. I see your objections—of course. I may say that I even shared some of them—till——"

She allowed him a minute in which to resume, but, as he kept silence, she ventured to ask:

"Does that mean that you don't share them now?"

"I see what there is to be said—all round. It isn't to be expected, dear, that you, as a woman, not used to business——"

"Oh, but I didn't understand that this *was* business. That's just the point. To borrow money might be business—to borrow it on security, you know, or whatever else is the usual way—but not to take it as a present."

He jerked himself up into a forward posture. When he replied to her, it was with didactic, explanatory irritation.

"When I said that, I was legitimately using language that might be called exaggerated. Hyperbole is, I believe, the term grammarians use for it. I didn't expect you, dear, to take me up so literally. It isn't like you. You generally have more imagination. As a matter of fact, Davenant's offer was that of a loan——"

"Oh! So it was—that man?"

"Yes; it was he. He expressly spoke of it as a *loan*. I myself interpreted it as a gift simply to emphasize its extraordinary generosity. I thought you'd appreciate that. Do you see?"

"Perfectly, papa; and it's the extraordinary generosity that seems to me just what makes it impossible. Why should Mr. Davenant be generous to us? What does he expect to gain?"

"I had that out with him. He said he didn't expect to gain anything."

"And you believed him?"

"Partly; though I suppose he has something up his sleeve. It wasn't my policy to question him too closely about that. It's not altogether my first concern. I need the money."

"But you don't need the money—in that way, papa?"

"I need it in any way. If Davenant will let me have it—especially on such terms—I've no choice but to take it."

"Oh, don't, papa. I'm sure it isn't right. I—I don't like him."

"Pff! What's that got to do with it? This is business."

"No, papa. It's not business. It's a great deal more—or a great deal less—I don't know which."

"You don't know anything about it at all, dear. You may take that from me. This is a man's affair. You really *must* leave it to me to deal with it." Once more he fell back into the depth of his arm-chair and closed his eyes. "If you don't mind I think I should like a little nap. What have you got so especially against Davenant, anyhow?"

"I've nothing against him—except that I've never liked him."

"What do you know about him? When did you ever see him?"

"I *haven't* seen him for years—not since Drusilla used to bring him to dances, when we were young girls. She didn't like it particularly, but she had to do it because he was her father's ward and had gone to live with them. He was uncouth—aggressive. Wasn't he a foundling, or a street Arab, or something like that? He certainly seemed so. He wasn't a bit—civilized. And once he—he said something—he almost insulted me. You wouldn't take his money now, papa?"

There was no answer. He breathed gently. She spoke more forcibly.

"Papa, you wouldn't let a stranger pay your debts?"

He continued to breathe gently, his eyes closed, the long black lashes curling on his cheek.

"Papa, darling" she cried, "I'll help you. I'll take everything on myself. I'll find a way—somehow. Only, *don't* do this."

He stirred, and murmured sleepily—

"You attend to your wedding, dear. That'll be quite enough for you to look after."

"But I can't have a wedding if Mr. Davenant has to pay for it. Don't you see? I can't be married at all."

When he made no response to this shot, she understood finally that he meant to let the subject drop.

VII

IT was in the nature of a relief to Olivia Guion when, on the following day, her father was too ill to go to his office. A cold, caused by the exposure of two nights previous, and accompanied by a rising temperature, kept him confined to his room, though not to bed. The occurrence, by maintaining the situation where it was, rendered it impossible to take any irretrievable step that day. This was so much gain.

She had slept little; she had passed most of the night in active and, as it seemed to her, lucid thinking. Among the points clearest to her was the degree to which she herself was involved in the present business. In a measure, the transfer of a large sum of money from Peter Davenant to her father would be an incident more vital to her than to any one else, since she more than any one else must inherit its moral effects. While she was at a loss to see what the man could claim from them in return for his generosity, she was convinced that his exactions would be not unconnected with herself. If, on the other hand, he demanded nothing, then the lifelong obligation in the way of gratitude that must thus be imposed on her would be the most intolerable thing of all. Better any privation than the incurring of such a debt—a debt that would cover everything she was or could become. Its magnitude would fill her horizon; she must live henceforth in the world it made; her very personality would turn into a thing of confused origin, sprung, it was true, from Henry and Carlotta Guion in the first place, but taking a second lease of life from the man whose beneficence started her afresh. She would date back to him, as barbarous women date to their marriage or Mohammedans to the Flight. It was a relation she could not have endured toward a man even if she loved him; still less was it sufferable with one whom she had

always regarded with an indefinable disdain, when she had not ignored him. The very possibility that he might purchase a hold on her inspired a frantic feeling, like that of the ermine at pollution.

Throughout the morning she was obliged to conceal from her father this intense opposition—or, at least, to refrain from speaking of it. When she made the attempt he grew so feverish that the doctor advised the postponement of distressing topics till he should be better able to discuss them. She could only make him as comfortable as might be, pondering while she covered him up in the chaise-lounge, putting his books and his cigars within easy reach, how she could best convert him to her point of view. It was inconceivable to her that he would persist in the scheme when he realized how it would affect her.

She had gone down to the small oval sitting-room commanding the driveway, thinking it probable that Drusilla Fane might come to see her. Watching for her approach, she threw open the French window set in the rounded end of the room and leading out to the Corinthian-columned portico that adorned what had once been the garden side of the house. There was no garden now, only a stretch of elm-shaded lawn, with a few dahlias and zinnias making gorgeous clusters against the already gorgeous autumn-tinted shrubbery. On the wall of a neighbouring brick house, Virginia creeper and ampelopsis added fuel to the fire of surrounding colour, while a maple in the middle distance blazed with all the hues that might have flamed in Moses's burning bush. It was one of those days of the American autumn when the air is shot with gold, when there is gold in the light, gold on the foliage, gold on the grass, gold on all surfaces, gold in all shadows, and a gold sheen in the sky itself. Red gold like a rich lacquer overlay the trunks of the occasional pines, and pale-yellow gold, beaten and thin, shimmered along the pendulous garlands of the American elms, where they caught the sun. It

was a windless morning, and a silent one ; the sound of a hammer or of a motorist's horn, coming up from the slope of splendid woodland that was really the town, accentuated rather than disturbed the immediate stillness.

To Olivia Guion this quiet ecstasy of nature was uplifting. Its rich, rejoicing quality restored as by a tonic her habitual confidence in her ability to carry the strongholds of life with a high and graceful hand. Difficulties that had been paramount, overpowering, fell all at once into perspective, becoming heights to be scaled rather than barriers defying passage. For the first time in the twenty-four hours since the previous morning's revelations, she thought of her lover as bringing comfort rather than as creating complications.

Up to this minute he had seemed to withdraw from her, to elude her As a matter of fact, though she spoke of him rarely, and always with a purposely prosaic touch, he was so romantic a figure in her dreams that the approach of the sordid and the ugly had dispelled his image. It was quite true, as she had said to Drusilla Fane, that from one point of view she didn't know him very well. She might have said that she didn't know him at all on any of those planes where rents and the price of beef are factors. He had come into her life with much the same sort of appeal as the wandering knight of the days of chivalry made to the damsel in the family fortress. Up to his appearing she had thought herself too sophisticated and too old to be caught by this kind of fancy, especially as it was not the first time she had been exposed to it. In the person of Rupert Ashley, however, it presented itself with the requisite limitations and accompaniments. He was neither so young nor so rich nor of such high rank as to bring a disproportionate element into their romance, while at the same time he had all the endowments of looks, birth, and legendary courage that the heroine craves in the hero. When he was not actually under her eyes, her imagination em-

bodied him most easily in the *svelte* elegance of the King Arthur beside Maximilian's tomb at Innspruck.

Their acquaintance had been brief, but illuminating —one of those friendships that can afford to transcend the knowledge of mere outward personal facts to leap to the things of the heart and the spirit. It was one of the commonplaces of their intimate speech together that they "seemed to have known each other always;" but now that it was necessary for her to possess some practical measure of his character, she saw, with a sinking of the heart, that they had never passed beyond the stage of the poetic and pictorial.

Speculating as to what he would say when he received her letter telling of her father's misfortunes, she was obliged to confess that she "had not the remotest idea." Matters of this sort belonged to a world on which they had deliberately turned their backs. That is to say, she had turned her back on it deliberately, though by training knowing its importance, fearing that to him it would seem mundane, inappropriate, American. This course had been well enough during the period of a high-bred courtship, almost too fastidiously disdainful of the commonplace; but now that the Fairy Princess had become a beggar-maid, while Prince Charming was Prince Charming still, it was natural that the former should recognize its insufficiency. She had recognized it fully yesterday; but this morning, in the optimistic brightness of the golden atmosphere, romance came suddenly to life again and confidence grew strong. Drusilla had said that she, Olivia, knew him well enough to be sure that he would want to do everything right—together. They would save her father, whom she loved so tenderly, from making rash mistakes, and—who knew?—find a way, perhaps, to rescue him in his troubles and shelter his old age.

She was so sure of herself to-day, and so nearly sure of Ashley, that even the shock of seeing Peter Davenant coming up the driveway, between the clumps of shrub-

bery, brought her no dismay. She was quick in reading the situation. It was after eleven o'clock; he had had time to go to Boston, and, learning that her father was not at his office, had come to seek him at home.

She made her arrangements promptly. Withdrawing from the window before he could see her, she bade the maid say that, Mr Guion being ill, Miss Guion would be glad to see Mr. Davenant, if he would have the kindness to come in. To give an air of greater naturalness to the *mise-en-scène*, she took a bit of embroidery from her workbasket and began to stitch at it, seating herself near the open window. She was not without a slight, half amused sense of lying in ambush, as if some Biblical voice were saying to her, "Up! for the Lord hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand."

"My father isn't well," she explained to Davenant, when she had shaken hands with him and begged him to sit down. "I dare say he may not be able to go out for two or three days to come."

"So they told me at his office. I was sorry to hear it."

"You've been to his office, then? He told me you were there yesterday. That's partly the reason why I've ventured to ask you to come in."

She went on with her stitching, turning the canvas first on one side and then on the other, sticking the needle in with very precise care. He fancied she was waiting for him to "give himself away" by saying something, no matter what. Having, however, a talent for silence without embarrassment, he made use of it, knowing that by means of it he could force her to resume.

He was not at ease; he was not without misgiving. It had been far from his expectation to see her on this errand, or, for the matter of that, on any errand at all. It had never occurred to him that Guion could speak to her of a transaction so private, so secret, as that proposed between them. Since, then, his partner in

the undertaking had been foolish, Davenant felt the necessity, on his side, of being doubly discreet. Moreover, he was intuitive enough to feel her antipathy toward him on purely general grounds. "I'm not her sort," was the summing up of her sentiments he made for himself. He could not wholly see why he excited her dislike, since, beyond a moment of idiotic presumption long ago, he had never done her any harm.

He fancied that his personal appearance, as much as anything, was displeasing to her fastidiousness. He was so big, so awkward; his hands and feet were so clumsy. A little more and he would have been ungainly; perhaps she considered him ungainly as it was. He had tried to negative his defects by spending a great deal of money on his clothes and being as particular as a girl about his nails; but he felt that with all his efforts he was but a bumpkin compared with certain other men—Rodney Temple, for example—who never took any pains at all. Looking at her now, her pure, exquisite profile bent over her piece of work, while the sun struck coppery gleams from her masses of brown hair, he felt as he had often felt in rooms filled with fragile specimens of art—flower-like cups of ancient glass, dainty groups in Meissen, mystic lovelinesses wrought in amber, ivory, or jade—as if his big, gross personality ought to shrink into itself and he should walk on tiptoe.

"I understand from my father," she said, when she found herself obliged to break the silence, "that you've offered to help him in his difficulties. I couldn't let the occasion pass without telling you how much I appreciate your generosity."

She spoke without looking up; words and tone were gently courteous, but they affected him like an April zephyr, that ought to bring the balm of spring and yet has the chill of ice in it.

"Haven't you noticed," he said slowly, choosing his words with care, "that generosity consists largely in the

point of view of the other party? You may give away an old cloak for the sake of getting rid of it; but the person who receives it thinks you kind."

"I see that," she admitted, going on with her work, "and yet there are people to whom I shouldn't offer an old cloak, even if I had one to give away."

He coloured promptly. "You mean that if they needed anything you'd offer them the best you had."

"I wonder if you'd understand that I'm not speaking ungraciously if I said that I shouldn't offer them anything at all?"

He put up his hand and stroked his long, fair moustache. It was the sort of rebuke to which he was sensitive. It seemed to relegate him to another land, another world, another species of being from those to which she belonged. It was a second or two before he could decide what to say. "No, Miss Guion," he answered then; "I don't understand that point of view."

"I'm sorry. I hoped you would."

"Why?"

She lifted her clear grey eyes on him for the briefest possible look. "Need I explain?"

The question gave him an advantage he was quick to seize. "Not at all, Miss Guion. You've a right to your own judgments. I don't ask to know them."

"But I think you ought. When you enter into what is distinctly our private family affair, I've a right to give my opinion."

"You don't think I question that?"

"I'm afraid I do. I imagine you're capable of carrying your point, regardless of what I feel."

"But I've no point to carry. I find Mr. Guion wanting to borrow a sum of money that I'm prepared to lend. It's a common situation in business."

"Ah, but this is not business. It's charity."

"Did Mr. Guion tell you so?"

"He did. He told me all about it. My father has no secrets from me."

"Did he use the word—charity?"

"Almost. He said you offered him a loan, but that it really was a gift."

His first impulse was to repudiate this point of view, but a minute's reflection decided him in favour of plain speaking. "Well," he said slowly, "suppose it *was* a gift. Would there be any harm in it?"

"There wouldn't be any harm, perhaps; there would only be an—impossibility." She worked very busily, and spoke in a low voice, without looking up. "A gift implies two conditions—on the one side the right to offer, and on the other the freedom to take."

"But I should say that those conditions existed—between Mr. Guion and me."

"But not between you and me. Don't you see? That's the point. To any such transaction as this I have to be, in many ways, the most important party."

Again he was tempted to reject this interpretation; but, once more, on second thought, he allowed it to go uncontested. When he spoke it was to pass to another order of question.

"I wonder how much you know?

"About my father's affairs? I know everything."

"Everything?"

"Yes; everything. He told me yesterday. I didn't expect him to come last home night at all; but he came—and told me what you had proposed."

"You understood, then," Davenant stammered, "that he might have to—to—go away?"

"Oh, perfectly."

"And aren't you very much appalled?"

The question was wrung from him by sheer astonishment. That she should sit calmly embroidering a sofa-cushion, with this knowledge in her heart, with this possibility hanging over her, seemed to him to pass the limits of the human. He knew there were heroic women; but he had not supposed that with all their heroism they carried themselves with such sang-froid. Before replying

she took time to search in her workbasket for another skein of silk.

"Appalled is scarcely the word. Of course it was a blow to me; but I hope I know how to take a blow without flinching."

"Oh, but one like this——"

"We're able to bear it. What makes you think we can't? If we didn't try, we should probably involve ourselves in worse."

"But how could there be worse?"

"That's what I don't know. You see, when my father told me of your kind offer, he didn't tell me what you wanted."

"Did he say I wanted anything?"

"He said you hadn't asked for anything. That's what leaves us so much in the dark."

"Isn't it conceivable——" he began, with a slightly puzzled air.

"Not that it matters," she interrupted hurriedly. "Of course, if we had anything with which to compensate you—anything adequate, that is—I don't say that we shouldn't consider seriously the suggestion you were good enough to make. But we haven't. As I understand it, we haven't anything at all. That settles the question definitely. I hope you see."

"Isn't it conceivable," he persisted, "that a man might like to do a thing, once in a way, without——"

"Without asking for an equivalent in return? Possibly. But in this case it would only make it harder for me."

"How so?"

"By putting me under an overwhelming obligation to a total stranger—an obligation that I couldn't bear, while still less could I do away with it."

"I don't see," he reasoned, "that you'd be under a greater obligation to me in that case than you are to others already."

"At present," she corrected, "we're not under an

obligation to anyone. My father and I are contending with circumstances; we're not asking favours of individuals. I know we owe money—a great deal of money—to a good many people——"

"Who are total strangers, just like me."

"Not total strangers just like you—but total strangers whom I don't know, and don't know anything about, and who become impersonal from their very numbers."

"But you know Mrs. Rodman and Mrs. Clay. They're not impersonal."

All he saw for the instant was that she arrested her needle half-way through the stitch. She sat perfectly still, her head bent, her fingers rigid, as she might have sat in trying to catch some sudden, distant sound. It was only in thinking it over afterward that he realized what she must have lived through in the seconds before she spoke.

"Does my father owe money to *them?*"

The hint of dismay was so faint that it might have eluded any ear but one rendered sharp by suspicion. Davenant felt the blood rushing to his temples and a singing in his head. "My God, she didn't know!" he cried inwardly. The urgency of retrieving his mistake kept him calm and cool, prompting him to reply with assumed indifference:

"I really can't say anything about it. I suppose they would be among the creditors—as a matter of course."

For the first time she let her clear, grave eyes rest fully on him. They were quiet eyes, with exquisitely finished lids and lashes. In his imagination their depth of what seemed like devotional reverie contributed more than anything else to her air of separation and remoteness.

"Isn't it very serious—when there's anything wrong with estates?"

He answered readily, still forcing a tone of careless matter-of-fact.

"Of course it's serious. Everything is serious in

business. Your father's affairs are just where they can be settled—now. But if we put it off any longer it might not be so easy. Men often have to take charge of one another's affairs—and straighten them out—and advance one another money—and all that—in business."

She looked away from him again, absently. She appeared not to be listening. There was something in her manner that advised him of the uselessness of saying anything more in that vein. After a while she folded her work, smoothing it carefully across her knee. The only sign she gave of being unusually moved was in rising from her chair and going to the open window, where she stood with her back to him, apparently watching the dartings from point to point of a sharp-eyed grey squirrel.

Rising as she did, he stood waiting for her to turn and say something else. Now that the truth was dawning on her, it seemed to him as well to allow it to grow clear. It would show her the futility of further opposition. He would have been glad to keep her ignorant; he regretted the error into which she herself unwittingly had led him; but, since it had been committed, it would not be wholly a disaster if it summoned her to yield.

Having come to this conclusion, he had time to make another observation while she still stood with her back to him. It was to consider himself fortunate in having ceased to be in love with her. In view of all the circumstances, it was a great thing to have passed through that phase and come out of it. He had read somewhere that a man is never twice in love with the same person. If that were so, he could fairly believe himself immune, as after a certain kind of malady. If it were not for this he would have found in her hostility to his efforts and her repugnance to his person a temptation—a temptation to which he was specially liable in regard to living things—to feel that it was his right to curb the spirit and tame the rebellion of whatever was restive to his control. There was something in this haughty, high-strung crea-

ture, poising herself in silence to stand upright in the face of fate, that would have called forth his impulse to dominate her will, to subdue her lips to his own, if he had really cared. Fortunately he didn't care, and so could seek her welfare with detachment.

Turning slowly, she stood grasping the back of the chair from which she had risen. He always remembered afterward that it was a chair of which the flowing curves and rich interlacings of design contrasted with her subtly emphasized simplicity. He had once had the morbid curiosity to watch in an English lawcourt the face and attitude of a woman—a surgeon's wife—standing in the dock to be sentenced to death. It seemed to him now that Olivia Guion stood like her—with the same resoluteness, not so much desperate as slightly dazed.

"Wasn't it for something of that kind—something wrong with estates—that Jack Berrington was sent to prison?"

The question took him unawares. "I—I don't remember."

"I do. I should think you would. The trial was in all the papers. It was the Gray estate. He was Mrs. Gray's trustee. He ruined the whole Gray family."

"Possibly." He did his best to speak airily. "In the matter of estates there are all sorts of hitches that can happen. Some are worse than others of course——"

"I've seen his wife, Ada Berrington, once or twice, when I've been in Paris. She lives there, waiting for him to come out of Singville. She avoids her old friends when she can—but I've seen her."

"I think I remember hearing about them," he said, for the sake of saying something. "but——"

"I should like to go and talk with my father. Would you mind waiting?"

She made as though she would pass him, but he managed to bar her way.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, Miss Guion. If

he's not wel it'll only upset him. Why not let everything be just as it is? You won't regret it a year hence, believe me. In nine things out of ten you'd know better than I; but this is the tenth thing, in which I know better than you. Why not trust me, and let me have a free hand?"

"I'm afraid I must go to my father. If you'll be kind enough to wait, I'll come back and tell you what he says. Then we shall know. Will you please let me pass?"

He moved to one side. He thought again of the woman in the English law-court. It was like this that she walked from the dock—erect, unflinching, graceful, with eyes fixed straight before her, as though she saw something in the air.

He watched her cross the hall on the foot of the staircase. There she paused pensively. In a minute or two she came back to the sitting-room door.

"If it should be like—like Jack Berrington," she said from the threshold, with a kind of concentrated quiet in her manner, "then—what you suggested—would be more out of the question than ever."

"I don't see that," he returned, adopting her own tone. "I should think it would be just the other way."

She shook her head.

"There are a lot of points of view that you haven't seen yet," he persisted. "I could put some of them before you if you'd give me time."

"It would be no use doing that. I should never believe anything but that we, my father and I, should bear the responsibilities of our own acts."

"You'll think differently," he began, "when you've looked at the thing all round; and then——"

But before he could complete his sentence she had gone.

Having seen her go upstairs, he waited in some uncertainty. When fifteen or twenty minutes had gone by and she did not return, he decided to wait no longer.

Picking up his hat and stick from the chair on which he had laid them, he went out by the French window, making his way to the gate across the lawn.

VIII

FINDING the door of her father's room ajar, Miss Guion pushed it open and went in.

Wearing a richly quilted dressing-gown, with cuffs and rolled collar of lavender silk, he lay asleep in the chaise-longue, a tan-coloured rug across his feet. On a table at his left stood a silver box containing cigars, a silver ash-tray, a silver match-box, and a small silver lamp burning with a tiny flame. Each piece was engraved with his initials and a coat-of-arms. On his right there was an adjustable reading-stand, holding an open copy of a recent English review. One hand, adorned with an elaborately emblazoned seal-ring, hung heavily toward the floor; a cigar that had gone out was still between the fingers. His head, resting on a cushion of violet brocade, had fallen slightly to one side.

She sat down beside him, to wait till he woke up. It was a large room, with white doors and wainscotting. Above the woodwork it was papered in pale yellow. On the walls there were water-colours, prints, photographs, and painted porcelain plaques. Over the bed, for decorative rather than devotional purposes, hung an old French ivory crucifix, while lower down was a silver holy-water stoup of Venetian make, that was oftenest used for matches. It had been the late Mrs. Guion's room, and expressed her taste. It contained too many ornaments, too many knick-knacks, too many mirrors, too many wardrobes, too many easy chairs, too much embossed silver on the dressing-table, too much old porcelain, wherever there was a place for it. Everything was costly, from the lace coverlet on the bed to the Persian rugs on the floor.

Olivia looked vaguely about the room, as on an apartment she had never before seen. She found herself speculating as to the amount these elaborate furnishings would fetch if sold. She recalled the fact, forgotten till now, that when the Berrington's belongings, purchased with reckless extravagance, passed under the hammer, they had gone for a song. She made the same forecast regarding the contents of Tory Hill. Much money had been spent on them, but, with the exception, perhaps, of some of the old portraits, there was little of real intrinsic value. She made the reflection coldly, drearily, as bearing on things that had no connection with herself.

Her eyes travelled back to her father. With the muscles of the face relaxed in sleep, he looked old and jaded. The moustache, which had not been waxed or curled that day, sagged at the corners, the mouth sagging under it. Above the line of the beard the skin was mottled and puffy. The lashes rested on his cheeks with the luxuriance of a girl's, and the splendid eyebrows had all their fulness ; but the lids twitched and quivered like those of a child that has fallen asleep during a fit of weeping.

It was this twitching that softened her, that compelled her to judge him from the most merciful point of view. There was something piteous about him, something that silenced reproaches, that disarmed severity. She had come upstairs staggered, incredulous—incredulous and yet convinced—outraged, terrified ; but now the appeal of that fagged face and those quivering lids was too strong for her. It wrought in her not so much sympathy as comprehension, an understanding of him such as she had never before arrived at. In his capacity of father she had loved him unrestrainedly, but admired him with reserves. It was impossible not to love a parent so handsome, so genial, so kind, so generally admired ; it was equally impossible not to criticize, however gently, a man with such a love of luxury, of

unwarranted princeliness, and of florid display. She was indulgent to his tastes in the degree to which a new and enlightened generation can be tolerant of the errors of that preceding it, but she could not ignore the fact that the value he set on things—in morals, society, or art—depended on their power to strike the eye. She had smiled at that, as at something which, after all, was harmless. She had smiled too, when he offered to himself—and to her also, it had to be admitted—the best of whatever could be had, since, presumably, he could afford it; though, as far as she was concerned, she would have been happier with simpler standards and a less ambitious mode of life. In following the path her parents had marked out for her, and to some extent beaten in advance, she had acquiesced in their plans rather than developed wishes of her own. Having grown tired of her annual round of American and English country-houses, with interludes for Paris, Biarritz, or Cannes, she had gone on chiefly because, as far as she could see, there was nothing else to do.

Looking at him now, it came over her for the first time that she must be a disappointment to him. He had never given her reason to suspect it, and yet it must be so. First among the aims for which he had been striving, and to attain to which he had hazarded so much, there must have been the hope that she should make a brilliant match. That, and that alone, would have given them as a family the sure international position he had coveted, and which plenty of other Americans were successful in securing.

It was only of late years, with the growth of her own independent social judgment, that she could look back over the past and see the Guions as in the van of that movement of the New World back upon the Old of which the force was for ever augmenting. As Drusilla Fane was fond of saying, it was a manifestation of the nomadic, or perhaps the predatory, spirit characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. It was part of that impulse

to expand, annex, appropriate, which had urged the Angles to descend on the shores of Kent and the Normans to cross from Dives to Hastings. Later, it had driven their descendants over the Atlantic, as individuals, as households, or as "churches"; and now, from their rich, comfortable, commonplace homes in New England, Illinois, or California, it bade later descendants still lift up their eyes and see how much there was to be desired in the lands their ancestors had left behind—fair parks, stately manors, picturesque châteaux, sonorous titles, and varied, dignified ways of living.

To a people with the habit of compassing sea and land to get whatever was good to have the voyage back was nothing, especially in the days of easy money and steam. The Guions had been among the first to make it. They had been among the first Americans to descend on the shores of Europe with the intention—more or less obscure, more or less acknowledged, as the case might be—of acquiring and enjoying the treasures of tradition by association or alliance or any other means that might present themselves. Richard Guion, grandfather of Henry Guion, found the way to cut a dash in the Paris of the early Second Empire and to marry his daughter, Victoria Guion, to the Marquis de Melcourt. From the simple American point of view of that day and date it was a dazzling match, long talked of by the naïve Press of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia.

By the more ambitious members of the Guion house it was considered as the beginning of a glorious epoch; but, looking back now, Olivia could see how meagre the results had been. Since those days a brilliant American society had sprung up on the English stem, like a mistletoe on an oak; but, while Henry and Carlotta Guion would gladly have struck their roots into that sturdy trunk, they lacked the money essential to parasitic growth. As for Victoria Guion, French life, especially the old royalist phase of it, which offers no crevices on its creaseless bark in which a foreign

seed can germinate, absorbed her within its tough old blossom as a pitcher-plant sucks in a fly. Henceforth the utmost she could do for her kith and kin was to force open the trap from time to time, so that Olivia, if she liked, could be swallowed too. In that task the old lady was not only industrious but generous, offering to subscribe handsomely toward the *dot*, as well as giving it to be understood that the bride-elect would figure in the end as her residuary legatee. Owing to this prospect Olivia had been compelled to decline a comte and a vicomte of crusading ancestry, procured at some pains by Madame de Melcourt; but when she also refused the eminently eligible Duc de Berteuil, whose terms in the way of dowry were reasonable, while he offered her a splendidly historic name and background, the Marquise not unnaturally lost her temper and declared that she washed her hands of her grandniece once for all.

Not till this minute had Olivia ever considered that this reluctance on her part to be "well established" must have been something like a grief to her father, for he had never betrayed a sign of it. On the contrary, he had seemed to approve her decisions, and had even agreed with her in preferring the mistletoe to the pitcher-plant. He welcomed her back to Tory Hill, where her residences were longer, now that she ceased to be much with Madame de Melcourt, and yet was always ready with money and his consent when she had invitations from her friends abroad. On her engagement to Rupert Ashley he expressed complete satisfaction, and said in so many words that it was a more appropriate match for her than any French alliance, however distinguished. His tenderness in this respect came over her now as peculiarly touching, unsealing the fount of filial pity at a moment when other motives might have made for indignation and revolt.

He opened his eyes without giving any other sign of waking.

"Hallo! What are you looking at me for?"

The tone was not impatient, but she heard in it an implication of fear.

"Papa, are your troubles anything like Jack Berrington's?"

He gazed at her without moving a muscle or changing a shade. She only fancied that in the long look with which he regarded her there was a receding, sinking, dying light, as though the soul within him was withdrawing.

"What makes you ask that?"

The intonation was expressionless, and yet, it seemed to her, a little wary.

"I ask chiefly because—well, because I think they are."

He looked at her for a minute more, perhaps for longer.

"Well, then—you're right."

Again she had the sensation, familiar to her since yesterday, of the world reeling to pieces around her while her own personality survived. When she spoke, her voice sounded as if it came out of the wildness of a surging wreck.

"Then that's what you meant in saying yesterday that when everything was settled you still wouldn't be able to pay all you owed."

"That's what I meant—exactly."

He lay perfectly still, except that he raised his hand and puffed at his extinct cigar. She looked down at the pattern on the Persian rug beside his couch—a symmetrical scroll of old rose, on a black ground sown with multicoloured flowerets.

"I suppose it's the Clay heirs and the Rodman heirs you owe the money to?"

"And the Compton heirs, and old Miss Burnaby, and the two Misses Brown, and——"

"Haven't they anything left?"

"Oh yes. It isn't all gone, by any means." Then

he added, as if to make a clean breast of the affair and be done with it: "The personal property—what you may call the cash—is mostly gone. Those that have owned real estate—like the Rodmans and Fanny Burnaby—well, they've got that still."

"I see." She continued to sit looking meditatively down at the rug. "I suppose," she ventured, after long thinking, "that that's the money we've been living on all these years?"

"Yes; in the main." He felt it useless to quibble or to try to extenuate the facts.

"How many years would that be?"

"I'm not very sure; on and off, it's about ten since I began using some of their money to—help out my income. Latterly—you may as well know it—I haven't had any real income of my own at all."

"So that their money has been paying for—for all this." Her hands made a confused little gesture, indicating the luxury of his personal appointments and of the room.

He shrugged his shoulders and arched his eyebrows in a kind of protest, which was nevertheless not denial. "W-well! If you choose to put it so!"

"And for me too," she went on, looking at him now with a bewildered opening of her large grey eyes—"for my visits, my clothes, my maid—everything!"

"I don't see any need," he said, with a touch of peevishness, "for going so terribly into detail."

"I don't see how it can be helped. It's so queer—and startling—to think I've had so much that wasn't mine."

"You mustn't think it was deliberately planned——" he began weakly.

"And now the suggestion is," she interrupted, "that Mr. Davenant should pay for it. That seems to me to make it even worse than—than before."

"I confess I don't follow you there," he complained. "If he doesn't—then I go to Singville."

"Wouldn't you rather?"

He raised himself stiffly into a sitting posture. "Would *you?*"

She did not hesitate in her reply. "Yes, papa. I *would* rather—if I were you."

"But since you're not me—since you are yourself—would you still rather that I went to Singville?"

There was a little lift to her chin, a faint colour in her face, as she replied: "I'd rather pay—however I did it. I'd rather pay—in any way—than ask some one else to do it."

He fell back on the cushion of violet brocade. "So would I—if I had only myself to think of. We're alike in that."

"Do you mean that you'd rather do it if it wasn't for me?"

"I've got to take everything into consideration. It's no use for me to make bad worse by refusing a good offer. I must try to make the best of a bad business for every one's sake. I don't want to take Davenant's money. It's about as pleasant for me as swallowing a knife. But I'd swallow a knife if we could only hush the thing up long enough for you to be married—and for me to settle some other things. I shouldn't care what happened after that. They might take me and chuck me into any hole they pleased."

"But I couldn't be married in that way, papa, dear. I couldn't be married at all to—to one man—when another man had a claim on me."

"Had a claim on you? How do you mean?"

"He'll have that—if he pays for everything—pays for everything for years and years back. Don't you see?"

"A claim on you for what, pray?"

"That's what I don't know. But whatever it is, I shall feel that I'm in his debt."

"Nonsense, dear. I call that morbid. It *is* morbid."

"But don't you think it's what he's working for? I

can't see anything else that—that could tempt him; and the minute we make a bargain with him we agree to his terms."

There was a long silence before he said wearily:

"If we call the deal off we must do it with our eyes open to the consequences. Ashley would almost certainly throw you over——"

"No; because that possibility couldn't arise."

"And you'll have to be prepared for the disgrace——"

"I shall not look on it as disgrace so much as—paying. It will be paying for what we've had—if not in one sort of coin, then in another. But whatever it is, we shall be paying the debt ourselves; we shan't be foisting it off on someone else."

"Why do you say we?"

"Well, won't it be we? I shall have my part in it, shan't I? You wouldn't shut me out from that? I've had my share of the—of the wrong, so I ought to take my share in the reparation. My whole point is that we should be acting together."

"They can't put *you* in Singville."

"No; but they can't keep me from sitting outside the walls. I shall want to do that, papa, if you're within. I'm not going to separate myself from you—or from anything you're responsible for. I couldn't if I wanted to; but as it happens I shouldn't try. I should get a kind of satisfaction out of it, shouldn't you?—the satisfaction of knowing that every day we suffered, and every night we slept through or wept through, and every bit of humiliation and dishonour, was so much contributed to the great work of—paying up. Isn't that the way you'd take it?"

"That's all very fine now, dear, when you're—what shall I say?—a little bit *exaltée*; but how do you think you'll feel when they've—when they've"—he continued to speak with his eyes shut convulsively—"when they've arrested me and tried me and sentenced me and locked me up for ten or fifteen years?"

"I shall feel as if the bitterness of death were past. But I should feel worse than that—I should feel as if the bitterness of both death and hell were still to come—if we didn't make an effort to shoulder our own responsibilities."

There was more in the same vein. He listened for the greater part of the time with his eyes closed. He was too unutterably tired to argue or to contest her point of view. Beyond suggesting that there were sides to the question she hadn't yet considered, he felt helpless. He was restrained, too, from setting them forth by a certain hesitation in demanding from her anything she did not concede of her own accord. That she would ultimately see for herself he had little doubt. In any case he was more or less indifferent from sheer spiritual exhaustion. He had ceased to direct, or try to direct his own affairs or those of anyone else. In his present condition he could only lie still and let come what might. Fate or God would arrange things either in the way of adjustment or of fatal ruin without interference on his part.

So as he lay and listened to his daughter he uttered some bit of reason or some feeble protest only now and then. When, occasionally, he looked at her, it was to see her—somewhat deliriously—white, slim, ethereal, inexorable, like the law of right. He was feverish; his head throbbed; whenever he opened his eyes the objects in the room seemed to whirl about, while she sat tense, low-voiced, gentle, a spirit of expiation.

Among the various ways in which he had thought she might take his dread announcement this one had never occurred to him; and yet, now that he saw it, he recognised it as just what he might have expected from the almost too rigid rectitude and decidedly too uncompromising pride that made up her character. It was the way, too, he admitted, most worthy of a Guion. It was the way he would have chosen for himself if he had nothing to consider but his own tastes. He himself

was as eager in his way to make satisfaction as she; he was only deterred by considerations of common sense. From the point of view of a man of business it was more than a little mad to refuse the money that would pay his creditors, hush up a scandal, and keep the course of daily life running in something like its accustomed channel, merely because for the rest of his days he must be placed in a humiliating moral situation. He wouldn't like that, of course; and yet everything else was so much worse, for his clients, even more than for himself. This was something she did not see. In spite of the measure in which he had agreed with her heroic views of "paying," he returned to that thought after she had kissed him and gone away.

During the conversation with him Olivia had so completely forgotten Davenant that when she descended to the oval sitting-room she was scarcely surprised to find that he had left and that Drusilla Fane was waiting in his place.

"You see, Olivia," Mrs. Fane reasoned, in her sympathetic, practical way, "that if you're not going to have your wedding on the 28th, you've got to do something about it now."

"What would you do?"

Olivia brought her mind back with some effort from the consideration of the greater issues to fix it on the smaller ones. In its way Drusilla's interference was a welcome diversion, since the point she raised was important enough to distract Olivia's attention from decisions too poignant to dwell on long.

"I've thought that over," Drusilla explained—"mother and I together. If we were you we'd simply scribble a few lines on your card and send it round by post."

"Yes? And what would you scribble?"

"We'd say—you see, it wouldn't commit you to anything too pointed—we'd say, simply 'Miss Guion's marriage to Colonel Ashley will not take place on

October 28th.' There you'd have nothing but the statement, and they could make of it what they liked."

"Which would be a good deal, wouldn't it?"

"Human nature being human nature, Olivia, you can hardly expect people not to talk. But you're in for that, you know, whatever happens now."

"Oh, of course."

"So that the thing to do is to keep them from going to the church next Thursday fortnight, and from pestering you with presents in the meanwhile. When you've headed them off on that you'll feel more free to—to give your mind to other things."

The suggestion was so sensible that Olivia fell in with it at once. She accepted too, Drusilla's friendly offer to help in the writing of the cards, of which it would be necessary to send out some two hundred. There being no time to lose, they set themselves immediately to the task, Drusilla at the desk, and Olivia writing on a blotting-pad at a table. They worked for twenty minutes or half an hour in silence.

Miss Guion's marriage to Colonel Ashley will not take place on October 28th."

"Miss Guion's marriage to Colonel Ashley will not take place on October 28th."

"Miss Guion's marriage to Colonel Ashley will not take place on October 28th."

The words, which to Olivia had at first sounded something like a knell, presently became, from the monotony of repetition, nothing but a sing-song. She went on writing them mechanically, but her thoughts began to busy themselves otherwise.

"Drusilla, do you remember Jack Berrington?"

The question slipped out before she saw its significance. She might not have perceived it so quickly even then had it not been for the second of hesitation before Drusilla answered and the quaver in her voice when she did.

"Y-es."

The amount of information contained in the embarrassment with which this monosyllable was uttered caused Olivia to feel faint. It implied that Drusilla had been better posted than herself; and if Drusilla, why not others?

"Do you know what makes me think of him?"

Again there was a second of hesitation. Without relaxing the speed with which she went on scribbling the same oft-repeated sentence, Olivia knew that her companion stayed her pen and half turned round.

"I can guess."

Olivia kept on writing. "How long have you known?"

Drusilla threw back the answer while blotting with unnecessary force the card she had just written: "a couple of days."

"Has it got about—generally?"

"Generally might be too much to say. Some people have got wind of it; and of course, a thing of that kind spreads."

"Of course."

After all, she reflected, perhaps it was just as well that the story should have come out. It was no more possible to keep it quiet than to calm an earthquake. She had said just now to her father that she would regard publicity less as disgrace than as part of the process of paying up. Very well? If they were a mark for idle tongues, then so much the better, since in that way they were already contributing some few pence toward quenching the debt.

"I should feel worse about it," Drusilla explained, after a silence of some minutes, "if I didn't think that Peter Davenant was trying to do something to—to help Cousin Henry out."

Olivia wrote energetically. "What's he doing?"

"Oh, the kind of thing men do. They seem to have wonderful ways of raising money."

"How do you know he's trying it?"

"I don't know for certain; I've only an idea. I rather gather it by the queer way he comes and goes. The minute a thing is in Peter's hands——"

"Have you such a lot of confidence in him?"

"For this sort of thing—yes. He's terribly able, so they say, financially. For the matter of that, you can see it by the way he's made all that money. Bought mines, or something, and sold them again. Bought 'em for nothing, and sold 'em for thousands and thousands."

"Did I ever tell you that he once asked me to marry him?"

Drusilla wheeled round in her chair and stared, open-mouthed, at her friend's back.

"*No!*"

"Oh, it was years ago. I dare say he's forgotten it."

"I'll bet you ten to one he hasn't."

Olivia took another card and wrote rapidly. "Do you suppose," she said, trying to speak casually, "that his wanting to help papa out has anything to do with that?"

"I shouldn't wonder. I shouldn't wonder at all."

"What *could* it have?"

"Oh, don't ask me! How should I know? Men are so queer. He's getting some sort of satisfaction out of it, you may depend."

Drusilla answered as she would have liked to be answered were she in a similar position. That an old admirer should come to her aid like a god from the machine would have struck her as the most touching thing in the world. As she wheeled round again to her task it was not without a pang of wholly impersonal envy at so beautiful a tribute. She had written two or three cards before she let fall the remark—

"And now poor, dear old mother is manœuvring to have *me* marry him."

The idea was not new to Olivia, so she simply said, "And are you going to?"

"Oh, I don't know." Drusilla sighed wearily, then added, "I shan't if I can help it."

"Does that mean that you'll take him if you can't do better?"

"It means that I don't know what I shall do at all. I'm rather sick of everything—and so I might do anything. I don't want to come back to live in America, and yet I feel an alien over there, now that I haven't Gerald to give me a *raison d'etre*. They're awfully nice to me—at Southsea, at Silchester, anywhere—and yet they really don't want me. I can see that as plainly as I can see your name on this card. But I can't keep away from them. I've no pride. At least, I've got the pride, but there's something in me stronger than pride, that makes me a kind of craven. I'm like a dog that doesn't mind being kicked so long as he can hang about under the dining-room table to sniff up crumbs. With my temperament it's perfectly humiliating, but I can't help it. I've got the taste for that English life as a Frenchman gets a taste for absinth—knows that it'll be the ruin of him, and yet goes on drinking."

"I suppose you're not in love with anyone over there?"

There was no curiosity in this question. Olivia asked it—she could scarcely tell why. She noticed that Drusilla stopped writing again and once more half turned round, though it was not till long afterward that she attached significance to the fact.

"Who on earth should I be in love with? What put that into your head?"

"Oh, I don't know. Stranger things have happened. You see a great many men——"

So they went skimming over the surface of confidence, knowing that beneath what they said there were depths below depths that they dared not disturb. All the same, it was some relief to both when the maid came to the door to summon them to luncheon.

IX

DURING the next day and the next Guion continued ill, so ill that his daughter had all she could attend to in the small tasks of nursing. The lull in events, however, gave her the more time for thinking, and in her thoughts two things struck her as specially strange. Of these, the first and more remarkable was the degree to which she identified herself with her father's wrongdoing. The knowledge that she had for so many years been profiting by his misdeeds produced in her a curious sense of having shared them. Though she took pains to remind herself that she was morally guiltless, there was something within her—an maginative quality perhaps—that rejected the acquittal. Pity, too, counted in her mental condition, as did also that yearning instinct called maternal, which keeps women faithful to the weak and the fallen among those they love. To have washed her own hands and said, "See here! I am innocent!" would have seemed to her much like desertion of a broken old man who had no one but her to stand by him. Even while she made attempts to reason herself out of it, the promptings to the vicarious acceptance of guilt, more or less native to the exceptionally strong and loyal, was so potent in her that she found herself saying in, substance if not in words, "Inasmuch as he did it, I did it too." It was not a purposely adopted stand on her part; it was not even clear to her why she was impelled to take it; she took it only because, obeying the dictates of her nature, she could do nothing else.

Nevertheless it occasioned her some surprise, whenever she had time to think of it, to note the speed with which she had adapted herself to the facts. Once revealed, she seemed to have always known them—to have shared that first embarrassment for ready money that had induced her father to borrow from funds so

temptingly under his control, and to have gone on with him, step by step, through the subsequent years of struggle and disaster. They were years over which the sun was already darkened and the moon turned into blood, so that, looking back on them, it was almost impossible to recapture the memory of the light-heartedness with which she had lived through them. It was incredible to her now that they had been years of travelling and visiting and dancing and hunting and motoring and yachting, of following fashion and seeking pleasure in whatever might have been the vogue of the minute. Some other self, some pale, secondary, astral self, must have crossed and recrossed the Atlantic and been a guest in great houses and become a favourite in London, Paris, Biarritz, Florida, Scotland, Rome! Some other self must have been sought out for her society, admired for her style, and privileged to refuse eligible suitors! Some other self must have met Rupert Ashley in the little house at Southsea and promised to become his wife! From the standpoint of the present it seemed to her as if an unreal life had ended in an unreal romance that was bringing to her, within a day or two, an unreal hero. She was forced again face to face with that fact that the man who was coming to marry her was, for all practical knowledge that she had of him, a stranger. In proportion as calamity encompassed her he receded, taking his place once more in that dim world she should never have frequented and in which she had no longer lot nor part.

She should never have frequented it for the simple reason that for all she had brought to it or got from it someone else had to pay. The knowledge induced a sense of shame which no consciousness of committed crime could have exceeded. She would have been less humiliated had she plotted and schemed to win flattery and homage for herself than she was in discovering that people had been tricked into giving them spontaneously. To drop the mask, to tear asunder the robe of pretence, to cry the truth from the housetops, and, like some

Scriptural woman taken in adultery, lie down, groaning and stunned, under the pelting of the stones of those who had not sinned, became to her, as the hours dragged on, an atonement more and more imperative.

But the second odd fact she had to contemplate was the difficulty of getting a new mode of life into operation. Notwithstanding all her eagerness to pay, the days were still passing in gentle routine, somewhat quietly because of her father's indisposition, but with the usual household dignity. There was a clockwork smoothness about life at Tory Hill, due to the most competent service secured at the greatest expense. Old servants, and plenty of them, kept the wheels going noiselessly even while they followed with passionate interest the drama being played in the other part of the house. To break in on the course of their duties, to distrub them, or put a stop to them, was to Olivia like an attempt to counteract the laws that regulate the sunrise. She knew neither how to set about it nor where to begin. There was something poignant in the irony of these unobtrusive services from the minute when her maid woke her in the morning till she helped her to change her dress for dinner, and yet there was nothing for it but to go through the customary daily round. When it became necessary to tell the women that the preparations for the wedding must be stopped and that the invitations to the two big dinners that were to be given in honour of Colonel Ashley had been withdrawn, she gathered from small signs—the feigned stolidity of some of them and the overacted astonishment of others—that they had probably been even better informed than Drusilla Fane. After that the food they brought her choked her, and the maid's touch on her person was like fire, while she still found herself obliged to submit to these long-established attentions.

She was reduced to drawing patience from what Guion told her as to his illness checking temporarily the course of legal action. Most of the men with whom it

lay to set the law in motion, notably Dixon, the District-Attorney, were old friends of his, who would hesitate to drag him from a sick-room to face indictment. He had had long interviews with Dixon about the case already, and knew how reluctant that official was to move in the matter, anyhow ; but as soon as he, Guion, was out and about again, all kindly scruples would have to yield. "You'll find," he explained to her, "that the question as to breaking camp will settle itself then. And besides," he added, "it'll be better to wait till Ashley comes and you know what he's likely to do for you."

With the last consideration she could not but agree, though she shrank from his way of putting it. It was some satisfaction at least to know that, since the two hundred cards she had sent out had reached their recipients, the process of public penance must in some measure have been started. She had seen no one who could tell her what the effect had been ; her bridesmaids evidently knew enough to consider silence the better part of sympathy ; not even Drusilla Fane had looked in or called her on the telephone during the last day or two ; but she could imagine pretty well the course that comment and speculation must be taking through the town. There would be plenty of blame, some jubilation, and, she felt sure, not a little sympathy withal. There was among her acquaintance a local American pride that had always been jealous of her European preferences and which would take the opportunity to get in its bit of revenge, but in general opinion would be kindly. There came an afternoon when she felt the desire to go forth to face it, to take her first impressions of the world in her new relationship towards it. She had not been beyond their own gate since the altered conditions had begun to obtain. She had need of the fresh air ; she had need to find her bearings ; she had need of a few minutes' intercourse with someone besides her father, so as not to imperil her judgment by dwelling too incessantly on an *idée fixe* Rupert Ashley would

land that night or the next morning. In forty-eight hours he would probably be in Boston. It was prudent, she reflected, to be as well poised and as sure of herself as possible before his arrival on the scene.

Her father was slightly better. He could leave his bed, and, wrapped in his violet dressing-gown, could lie on the chaise-longue, surrounded by the luxurious comforts that were a matter of course to him. As she made him snug he observed with a grim smile that his recovery was a pity. He could almost hear, so he said, Dixon and Johnstone and Hecksher and others of his cronies making the remark that his death would be a lucky way out of the scrape.

She had come, dressed for the street, to tell him she was walking down to the Temples', to see what had become of Drusilla Fane. She thought it needless to add that she was inventing the errand in order to go out and take notes on the new aspect the world must henceforth present to her.

He looked at her with an approval that gradually merged into a sense of comfort. She had chosen the simplest dress and hat in her wardrobe, as significant of a chastened soul; but simplicity more than anything else emphasised her distinction. "She'll be all right," he said consolingly to himself. "Whatever happens she's the kind to come out on top. Rupert Ashley would be a fool to throw over a superb, high-spirited creature like that. He'll not do it. Of that I feel sure."

The conviction helped him to settle more luxuriously into the depths of his couch and to relish the flavour of his cigar. He was quite sincere in the feeling that if she were but safe he should be more or less indifferent to the deluge overwhelming himself.

"Papa," she ventured at last, watching carefully the action of the little silver button-hook, as she buttoned her gloves, "if that Mr. Davenant came while I'm gone, you wouldn't change your mind, would you?"

"I don't think he's in the least likely to turn up."

"But if he did?"

"Well, I suppose you'll be back before long. We couldn't settle anything without talking it over, in any case."

Forced to be content with that, she kissed him and turned away.

She found a comfort in getting into the open air, into the friendly streets, under the shade of the familiar trees, that surprised her. The absence of pose characteristic of the average American town struck her for the first time as soothing. With none of the effort to make life conform to a rigid standard of propriety, which in an English community would be the first thing to notice, there was an implied invitation to the spirit to relax. In the slap-dash, go-as-you-please methods of building, paving, and cleaning she saw a tacit assumption that, perfection being not of this world, one is permitted to rub along without it. Rodney Lane, which in Colonial days had led to Governor Rodney's "Mansion," had long ago been baptized Algonquin Avenue by civic authorities with a love of the sonorous, but it still retained the characteristics of a New England village street. Elms arched over it with the regularity of a Gothic vaulting, and it straggled at its will. Its houses, set in open lawns, illustrated all the phases of the national taste in architecture as manifested throughout the nineteenth century, from the wooden Greek temple with a pillared façade of the early decades to the bizarre compositions, painted generally in dark red and yellow, with many gables and long sweeps of slanting roof, which marked that era's close. In most cases additions had been thrown out from time to time, ells trailing at the back, or excrescences bulging at the sides, that were not grotesque only because there had been little in the first effect to spoil. In more than one instance the original fabric was altered beyond recognition; here and there a house she could remember had altogether disappeared; a new one had replaced it that before long might be

replaced by a newer still. To Olivia the consoling thought was precisely in this state of transition, to which rapid vicissitude, for better or for worse, was something like a law. It made the downfall of her own family less exceptional, less bitter, when viewed as part of a huge impermanency, shifting from phase to phase, with no rule to govern it but the necessities of its own development.

Until this minute it was the very element in American life she had found most distasteful. Her inclinations, carefully fostered by her parents, had always been for the solid, the well-ordered, the assured, evolved from precedent to precedent till its conventions were fixed and its doings regulated as by a code of etiquette. Now, all of a sudden, she perceived that life in shirt-sleeves possessed certain advantages over a well-bred existence in full dress. It allowed the strictly human qualities an easier sort of play. Where there was no pretence at turning to the world a smooth, impeccable social front, toil and suffering, misfortune and disgrace, became things to be less ashamed of. Practically everyone in these unpretentious, tree-shaded houses knew what it was to struggle upward, with many a slip backward in the process and sometimes a crashing fall from the top. These accidents were understood. The result was the creation of a living atmosphere, not perhaps highly civilized, but highly sympathetic, charged with the comprehension of human frailty, into which one could carry one's dishonour, not wholly with equanimity but at least with the knowledge that such burdens were not objects for astonishment. As she descended the hill, therefore, she felt, as she had never felt before, the comforting assurance of being among brethren, before whom she would not have the weari some task of " keeping up appearances," and by whom she would be supported, even at the worst, through a fellow-feeling with her cares.

This consciousness helped her to be firm when, a

few minutes later, having reached the dike by the border of the Charles, she came face to face with Peter Davenant. She saw him from a long way off, but without recognition. She noticed him only as an unusually tall figure, in a summery grey suit, and a grey felt hat. He was sauntering in a leisurely way towards her, stopping now and then to admire some beautiful dog sniffing the scent of water-rats in the weeds or a group of babies tumbling on the sand, or a half-naked undergraduate sculling along the serpentine reaches of the river, or a college crew cleaving the waters with the precision of an arrow, to a long, rhythmic swing of eight slim bodies and a low brief grunt of command. The rich October light striking silvery gleams from the walls of the Stadium and burnished gold from the far-off dome of the State House brought all the hues of fire from the rim of autumnal hills on the western horizon. It touched up with soft dove-grey, in which were shades of green and purple, the row of unpainted, ramshackle wooden cabins—hovels of a colony of "squatters" that no zeal for civic improvement had ever been able to dislodge—lined along a part of the embankment, and wrought indefinable glories in the unkempt marshes, stretching away into shimmering distances, where factory windows blazed as if from inner conflagration and steam and smoke became roseate or iridescent.

The tall stranger, so much better dressed than the men who usually strolled on the embankment at this hour of a week-day afternoon, fixed her attention to such a degree as to make her forget that she herself was probably a subject of curiosity and speculation among the passers-by. It was with a little disappointment that as she came nearer she said to herself, "It's only—that man." Common fairness, however, obliged her to add that he seemed "more like a gentleman" than she had supposed. That he was good-looking, in a big, blond, Scotch or Scandinavian way, she had acknowledged from the first. On recognizing Davenant

her impulse was to pass him with the slightest recognition, but on second thoughts it seemed best for her to end the affair impending between them once for all.

"I'm sorry you didn't wait for me to come downstairs the other day," she said, after they had exchanged greetings, "because I could have told you that my father agreed with me—that it wouldn't be possible for us to accept your kind help."

"I hope he's better," was Davenant's only answer.

"Much better, thank you. When he's able to see you I know he will want to express his gratitude more fully than I can."

"I hoped he'd be able to see me to-day. I was on my way to Tory Hill."

She was annoyed both by his persistency and by the coolness of his manner as, leaning on his stick, he stood looking down at her. He looked down in a way that obliged her to look up. She had not realized till now how big and tall he was. She noticed, too, the squareness of his jaw, the force of his chin, and the compression of his straight, thin lips beneath the long curve of his moustache. In spite of his air of granite imperturbability, she saw that his fair skin was subject to little flashes of embarrassment or shyness, like a girl's. As she was in a mood to criticize, she called this absurd, and said of his blue eyes, resting on her with a pensive directness, as though he were studying her from a long way off, that they were hard Deep-set and caverned under heavy, overhanging brows, they more than any other feature imparted to his face the frowning and *farouche* effect by which she judged him. Had it not been for that, her hostility to everything he said and did might not have been so prompt. That he was working to get her into his power became more than ever a conviction the minute she looked into what she called that lowering gaze.

All the same, the moment was one for diplomatic action rather than for force. She allowed a half-smile

to come to her lips, and her voice to take a tone in which there was frank request, as she said: "I wish you wouldn't go."

"I shouldn't if it wasn't important. I don't want to annoy you more than I can help."

"I don't see how anything can be important when—when there's nothing to be done."

"There's a good deal to be done if we choose to do it; but we must choose at once. The Benn crowd is getting restive."

"That doesn't make any difference to us. My father has decided to take the consequences of his acts."

"You say that so serenely that I guess you don't understand yet just what they'd be."

"I do—I do, perfectly. My father and I have talked it all over. We know it will be terrible; and yet it would be more terrible still to let someone else pay our debts. I dare say you think me monstrous, but——"

"I think you mistaken. I don't want to say more than that. If I find Mr. Guion of the same opinion——"

"I see. You don't consider my word sufficient."

"Your word is all right, Miss Guion." He tried to laugh. "What you lack is authority. My dealings are with your father. I can't settle anything with—a substitute."

She coloured swiftly. "I don't presume to settle anything. I only thought I might give you some necessary information. I hoped, too, to save you a little trouble in sparing you the walk to Tory Hill."

He looked away from her, his eyes wandering up the reach of the river, over which the long, thin, many oared college craft shot like insects across a pool.

"Why should you be so bent on seeing your father follow Jack Berrington, when it could be avoided?"

"Why should you care? What difference does it make to you? If you'd only explain that——"

"It explains itself. If I saw a woman leap into the river there I should pull her out The more she in-

sisted on being drowned, the more I should try to save her.'

"But, you see, I'm not leaping into a river. On the contrary, I'm getting out of one. It seems to me that you'd only be forcing me back and making my last state worse than the first."

It took him a minute to grasp the force of this. "That would depend, of course, on the point of view. As a matter of fact, it's something with which I've nothing to do. It concerns you, and it concerns Mr. Guion, but it doesn't concern me. For me the whole thing is very simple. I've offered to lend Mr Guion a sum of money. It's for him to take or to leave. If he refuses it, I shan't be offended; and if he doesn't refuse it——"

"You'd let him have it, just the same?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"In spite of all I've said as to what I should feel?"

"But I'm not supposed to know anything about that, you know. I repeat that it isn't my affair. If Mr. Guion should accept my loan against your wishes—well, that's something you'd have to fix up with him."

She was some minutes silent, her eyes ranging over the river and the marshes, like his own.

"If you urged it on him," she said at last, "I think he'd take it."

"Then so much the better, from my point of view."

"Precisely; but then your point of view is a mystery. Not that it makes any difference," she hastened to add. "If my father accepts your loan, it will be for me to pay it back, in one way or another—if I ever can."

"We could talk of that," he smiled, trying to be reassuring, "after more important things had been settled."

"There wouldn't be anything more important—for me."

"Oh, you wouldn't find me an importunate creditor."

"That wouldn't help matters—so long as I owed

the debt. After all, we belong to that old-fashioned, rather narrow-minded class of New England people to whom debt of any kind is the source of something like anguish. At least," she corrected herself, " *I* belong to that class."

It was on his lips to remind her that in her case there could be no present release from indebtedness, there could only be a change of creditors ; but he decided to express himself more gracefully.

" Wouldn't it be possible," he asked, " to put the boot on the other foot, and to consider me as the person to whom the favour is shown in being allowed to do something useful ? "

She lifted her chin scornfully. " That would be childish. It would be a mere quibbling with words."

' But it would be true. It's the way I should take it.'

She confronted him with one of her imperious looks. " Why ? "

In the monosyllable there was a demand for complete explanation, but he met it with one of his frank smiles.

" Couldn't you let me keep that as my secret ? "

" So that you would be acting in the daylight and we in the dark."

" You might be in the dark, and still have nothing to be afraid of."

She shook her head. " I *should* be afraid. It was in the dark, according to the old story, that the antelope escaped a lion by falling into a hunter's trap."

" Do I look like that kind of a hunter ? " He smiled again at the absurdity of her comparison.

" You can't tell anything from looks—with men. With men a woman has only one principle to guide her—to keep on the safe side."

" I hope you won't think me uncivil, Miss Guion, if I point out that, at present, you haven't got a safe side to keep on. That's what I want to offer you."

"I might ask you why again, only that we should be going round in a circle. Since you don't mean to tell me, I must go without knowing; but I'm sure you can understand that to some natures the lion is less to be feared than the hunter."

"*He* doesn't feel so." He nodded his head in the direction of Tory Hill.

"He *feels* so. He's only a little—wavering."

"And I guess you're a little wavering too, Miss Guion, if you'd only own up to it."

He watched her straighten her slight figure, while her delicate features hardened to an expression of severity.

"I'm not wavering on the principle, nor because of anything I should have to face myself. If I have any hesitation, it's only because of what it would mean for papa."

He allowed an instant to pass while he looked down at her gravely. "And he's not the only one, you know," he said, with all the significance he could put into his tone.

His hint, however, was thrown away, since she was intent on her own line of thought. With a light nod of the head, dignified rather than discourteous, she departed, leaving him, to the great interest of the passers-by, leaning on his stick and staring after her.

X

AS Olivia continued on her way toward Rodney Temple's she was able to make it clear to herself that a chief reason for her dislike of Davenant sprang from his immovability. There was something about him like a giant rock. She got the impression that one might dash against him for ever and hurt no one but oneself. It was a trait new to her among American men, whom she generally found too yielding where women were concerned. This man had an aloofness, too,

that was curiously disconcerting. He made no approaches; he took no liberties. If he showed anything that resembled a personal sentiment towards her, it was dislike. Making that reflection and using that word, she was almost startled. A woman had sometimes disliked her; she knew that; but a man—never! And yet it was difficult to interpret Davenant's bearing towards her in any other way. It was a bearing in which there were no concessions to her whatever, while there was in it—it was only too plain!—a distinct intention to ignore her. For the time being this personal element in the situation loomed larger than any other. It challenged her; it even annoyed her. At the same time it gave Davenant an importance in her eyes which she was far from willing to concede.

Rodney Temple's house, which was really within the borders of Cambridge, built about 1840 by some Harvard professor in easy circumstances, had originally resembled a square brick box. In the course of seventy years it had passed through the hands of several owners, each of whom had built on an additional box according to his needs. To the north a rectangular wing of one story had been thrown out as a drawing-room; to the south a similar projection formed the library and study. A smaller square crowned the edifice as a cupola, while cubes of varying dimensions were half visible at the back. Against the warm red brick a Wren portico in white-painted wood, together with the white facings of the windows, produced an effect of vivid spotlessness, tempered by the variegated foliage of climbing vines. The limitations of the open lawn were marked by nothing but a line of shrubs.

Having arrived at the door, it was a relief to Olivia, rather than the contrary, to learn that the ladies were not at home, but that Mr. Temple himself would be glad to see her if she would come in. He had, in fact, espied her approach from his study window and had come out into the hall to insist on her staying. Within

a minute or two she found herself sitting in one of his big, shabby arm-chairs saying things preliminary to confidence.

It was a large room, with windows on three sides, through which the light poured in to find itself refracted by a hundred lustrous surfaces. The first impression received on entering what Rodney Temple called his workroom was that of colour—colour unlike that of pictures, flowers, gems, or sunsets, and yet of extraordinary richness and variety. Low bookcases, running round the room, offered on the broad shelf forming the top space for many specimens of that potter's art on which the old man had made himself an authority. Jars and vases stood on tables, plaques and platters hung on the walls, each notable for some excellence in shape, glaze, or decoration. Of Americans of his generation Rodney Temple had been among the first to respond to an appeal that came from ages immeasurably far back in the history of man. His imagination had been stirred in boyhood by watching a common country potter turn off bowls and flower-pots that sprang from the wheel in exquisite concentric forms or like opening lilies of red earth. Here, he had said to himself, is the beginning of everything we call art—here must have been the first intimation to man that beauty could be an element in the work of his own fingers.

In a handicraft that took the dust of the earth to minister to man's humblest needs, and yet contrived thereby to enrich his æsthetic life, young Rodney Temple, as he was then, found much that was congenial to his own mystical aspirations. During his early travels abroad the factories of Meissen and Sèvres interested him more than the Zwinger and the Louvre.

He frequented the booths and quays and dingy streets of the older European cities, bringing out from some lost hiding-place now an Arabic tile in which the green of the oasis intensified the blue of the desert sky; now a Persian bowl of hues that changed with a turn of

the head or a quiver of the lids ; now a Spanish plaque gleaming with metallic, opalescent colours, too indefinable to name, too fugitive for the eye to transmit to memory. Later he picked up strange examples which, like meteoric stones from another sphere, had found their mysterious way from Chinese palaces to grimy haunts in London, Amsterdam, or Florence, as the case might be—a blue-and-white jar of Chia-ching, or a Han ceremonial vessel in emerald green, encrusted from long burial, or a celadon bowl that resembled a cup of jade, or some gorgeously decorated bit of Famille Verte. He knew at first little or nothing of the nature and history of these precious "finds." He saw only that they were rare and lovely and that through beauty as a means of grace he entered into communion with men who had neither epoch nor ideals in common with himself.

In the end he became an authority on ceramic art by the simple process of knowing more about it than anybody else. When the trustees of the Harvard Gallery of Fine Arts awoke to that fact, he was an assistant professor of Greek in the University. Under his care, in the new position they offered him, a collection was formed of great celebrity and value ; but nothing in it was ever quite so dear to him as the modest treasures he had acquired for himself in the days of his young enthusiasm, when his fellow countrymen as yet cared for none of these things. As Olivia sat and talked her eye travelled absently from barbaric Rouen cornucopias and cockatoos to the encrusted snails and serpents of Bernard Palissy, resting long on a flowered *jardinière* by Veuve Perrin, of Marseilles. She had little technical knowledge of the objects surrounding her, but she submitted to the strange and soothing charm they never failed to work on her—the charm of stillness, of peace, as of things which, made for common homely uses, had passed beyond that stage into an existence of serenity and loveliness.

"When you spoke the other day," she said, after the conversation had turned directly on her father's affairs—"when you spoke the other day about a pillar of cloud, I suppose you meant what one might call—an overruling sense of right."

"That might do as one definition."

"Because in that case you may like to know that I think I've seen it."

"I thought you would if you looked for it."

"I didn't look for it. It was just—there!"

"It's always there; only, as in the case of the two disciples on the Emmaus road, our eyes are holden so that we don't see it."

"I should have seen it easily enough; but if you hadn't told me, I shouldn't have known what it was. I didn't suppose that we got that kind of guidance nowadays."

"The light is always shining in darkness, dearie; only the darkness comprehendeth it not. That's all there is to it."

He sat at his desk, overlooking the embankment and the curves of the Charles. It was a wide desk littered with papers, but with space, too, for some of the favourite small possessions that served him as paper-weights—a Chinese dragon in blue-green enamel, a quaintly decorated cow in polychrome Delft, a dancing satyr in biscuit de Sèvres. On the side remote from where he sat was a life-size bust of Christ in fifteenth-century Italian terra-cotta—the face noble, dignified, strongly sympathetic—once painted, but now worn to its natural tint, except where gleams of scarlet or azure showed in the folds of the vesture. While the old man talked, and chiefly while he listened, the fingers of his large, delicately articulated hand stroked mechanically the surfaces of a grotesque Chinese figure carved in apple-green jade. It was some minutes before Olivia made any response to his last words.

"Things *are* very dark to me," she confessed, "and

yet this light seems to me absolutely positive. I've had to make a decision that would be too frightful if something didn't seem to be leading me into the Street called Straight, as papa says. Did you know Mr. Davenant had offered to pay our debts?"

He shook his head.

"Of course I couldn't let him do it."

"Couldn't you?"

"Do you think I could?"

"Not if you think differently. You're the only judge."

"But if I don't, you know, papa will have to go——" She hesitated. "You know what would happen, don't you?"

"I suppose I do."

"And I could prevent it, you see, if I let papa take this money. I have to assume the responsibility of its refusal. It puts me in a position that I am beginning to feel—well, rather terrible."

"Does it?"

"You don't seem very much interested, Cousin Rodney. I hoped you'd give me some advice."

"Oh, I never give advice. Besides, if you've got into the Street called Straight, I don't see why you need advice from anyone."

"I do. The Street called Straight is all very well, but——"

"Then you're not so sure, after all."

"I'm sure in a way. If it weren't for papa I shouldn't have any doubt whatever. But it seems so awful for me to drive him into what I don't think he'd do of his own accord." She went on to explain Davenant's offer in detail. "So you see," she concluded, "that papa's state of mind is peculiar. He agrees with me that the higher thing would be not to take the money; and yet if I gave him the slightest encouragement he would."

"And you're not going to?"

"How could I, Cousin Rodney? How could I put

myself under such an obligation to a man I hardly know?'

"He could probably afford it."

"Is he so very rich?" There was a hint of curiosity in the tone.

Rodney Temple shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, rich enough. It would pretty well clean him out; but, then, that would do him good."

"Do him good—how?"

"He's spoiling for work, that fellow is. Since he's had all that money he's been of no use to himself or to anybody else. He's like good capital tied up in a stocking instead of being profitably invested."

"And yet we could hardly put ourselves in a humiliating situation just to furnish Mr. Davenant with an incentive for occupation, could we, Cousin Rodney?"

"I dare say not."

"And he isn't offering us the money merely for the sake of getting rid of it, do you think?"

"Then what *is* he offering it to you for?"

"That's exactly what I want to know. Haven't you any idea?"

"Haven't you?"

She waited a minute before deciding to speak openly. "I suppose you never heard that he once asked me to marry him?"

He betrayed his surprise by the way in which he put down the little Chinese figure and wheeled round more directly toward her.

"Who? Peter?"

She nodded.

"What the dickens made him do that?"

She opened her eyes innocently. "I'm sure I can't imagine."

"It isn't a bit like him. You must have led him on."

"I didn't!" she declared indignantly. "I never took any notice of him at all. Nothing could have astonished me more than his—his presumption."

"And what did you say to him? Did you box his ears?"

"I was very rude, and that's partly the trouble now. I feel as if he'd been nursing a grudge against me all these years—and was paying it."

"In that case he's got you on the hip, hasn't he? It's a lovely turning of the tables."

"You see that, Cousin Rodney, don't you. I *couldn't* let a man like that get the upper hand of me."

"Of course you couldn't, dearie. I'd sit on him if I were you, and sit on him hard. I'd knock him flat—and let Delia Rodman and Clorinda Clay go to the deuce."

She looked at him wonderingly. "Let—who—go to the deuce?"

"I said Delia Rodman and Clorinda Clay. I might have included Fanny Burnaby and the Brown girls. I meant them, of course. I suppose you've been doing a lot of worrying on their account."

"I—I haven't," she stammered. "I haven't thought of them at all."

"Then I wouldn't. They've got no legal claim on you whatever. When they put their money into your father's hands—or when other people put it there for them—they took their chances. Life is full of risks like that. You're not responsible for them, not any more than you are for the fortunes of war. If they've had bad luck, then that's their own look out. Oh, I shouldn't have them on my mind for a minute."

She was too startled to suspect him of ruse or strategy.

"I haven't had them on my mind. It seems queer—and yet I haven't. Now that you speak of them, of course I see——" She passed her hand across her brow. There was a long, meditative silence before she resumed. "I don't know what I've been dreaming of that it didn't occur to me before. Papa and Mr Davenant both said that I hadn't considered all the sides to the question; and I suppose that's what they were thinking of. It seems so obvious—now."

She adjusted her veil and picked up her parasol as though about to take leave; but when she rose it was only to examine, without seeing it, a plaque hanging on the wall.

"If papa were to take Mr. Davenant's money," she said, after a long silence, without turning round, "then his clients would be as well off as before, wouldn't they?"

"I presume they would."

"And now, I suppose, they're very poor?"

"I don't know much about that. None of them were great heiresses, as it was. Miss Prince, who keeps the school, told your cousin Cherry yesterday that the Rodman girls had written her from Florence, asking if she could give them a job to teach Italian. They'll have to teach away like blazes now—anything and everything they know."

She turned round towards him, her eyes misty with distress.

"See this bit of jade?" he continued, getting up from his chair. "Real jade that is. Cosway, of the Gallery, brought it to me when he came home from Peking. That's not real jade you've got at Tory Hill. It's jadeite."

"Is it?" She took the little mandarin in her hand, but without examining him. "I've no doubt you've been dreadfully worried about them—papa's clients, I mean."

"W-well—a little—or, rather, not at all. That is, I should have been worried if it hadn't been for the conviction that something would look out for them. Something always does, you know."

The faint smile that seemed to have got frozen on her lips quivered piteously. "I wish you could have that comfortable feeling about me."

"Oh, I have. That'll be all right. You'll be taken care of from start to finish. Don't have a qualm of doubt about it. There's a whole host of ministering spirits—angels, some people call them—I don't say I

should myself—but there are legions of mighty influences appointed to wait on just such brave steps as you're about to take."

"That is, if I take them!"

"Oh, you'll take 'em all right, dearie. You'll not be able to help it when you see just what they ought to be In a certain sense they'll take you. You'll be passed along from point to point as safely as that bit of jade"—he took the carving from between her fingers and held it up—"as safely as that bit of jade has been transmitted from the quarries of Tibet to brighten my old eyes. It's run no end of risks, but the Angel of Beauty has watched over all its journeys. It's been in every sort of queer, mysterious place; it's passed through the hands of mandarins, merchants, and slaves; it's probably stood in palaces and been exposed in shops; it's certainly come over mountains and down rivers and across seas; and yet here it is, as perfect as when some sallow-faced dwarf of a craftsman gave it the last touch of the tool a hundred years ago. And that's the way it'll be with you, dearie. You may go through some difficult places, but you'll come out as unscathed as my little Chinaman. The Street called Straight is often a crooked one; and yet it's the surest and safest route we can take from point to point."

As, a few minutes later, she hurried homewards, this mystical optimism was to her something like a rose to a sick man—beautiful to contemplate, but of little practical application in alleviating pain. Her mind turned away from it. It turned away, too, from the pillar of cloud, of which the symbolism began to seem deceptive. Under the stress of the moment the only vision to which she could attain was that of the Misses Rodman begging for the pitiful job of teaching Italian in a young ladies' school. She remembered them vaguely—tall, scraggy, permanently girlish in dress and manner, and looking their true fifty only about the neck and eyes. With their mother they lived in a pretty villa on the

Poggio Imperiale, and had called on her occasionally when she passed through Florence. The knowledge of being indebted to them, of having lived on their modest substance and reduced them to poverty, brought her to the point of shame in which it would have been a comfort to have the mountains fall on her and the rocks cover her from the gaze of men. She upbraided herself for her blindness to the most obviously important aspect of the situation. Now that she saw it, her zeal to "pay," by doing penance in public, became tragic and farcical at once. The absurdity of making satisfaction to Mrs. Rodman and Mrs. Clay, to Fanny Burnaby and the Brown girls, by calling in the law, when less suffering—to her father at least—would give them actual cash, was not the least element in her humiliation.

She walked swiftly, seeing nothing of the cheerful stir around her, lashed along by the fear that Peter Davenant might have left Tory Hill. She was too intent on her purpose to perceive any change in her mental attitude towards him. She was aware of saying to herself that everything concerning him must be postponed; but beyond that she scarcely thought of him at all. Once the interests of the poor women who had trusted to her father had been secured, she would have time to face the claims of this new creditor; but nothing could be attempted till the one imperative duty was performed.

Going up the stairs towards her father's room, the sound of voices reassured her. Davenant was there still. That was so much relief. She was able to collect herself, to put on something like her habitual air of quiet dignity, before she pushed open the door and entered.

Guion was lying on the couch with the rug thrown over him. Davenant stood by the fireplace, endangering with his elbow a dainty Chelsea shepherdess on the mantelpiece. He was smoking one of Guion's cigars, which he threw into an ash-tray as Olivia came in.

Conversation stopped abruptly on her appearance.

She herself walked straight to the round table in the middle of the room, and for a second or two, which seemed much longer in space of time, stood silent, the tips of her fingers just touching a packet of papers strapped with rubber bands, which she guessed that Davenant must have brought. Through her downcast lashes she could see, thrown carelessly on the table, three or four strips, tinted blue or green or yellow, which she recognised as cheques.

"I only want to say," she began, with a kind of panting in her breath—"I only want to say, papa, that if . . . Mr. Davenant will . . . lend you the money . . . I shall be . . . I shall be . . . very glad."

Guion said nothing. His eyes, regarding her aslant, had in them the curious receding light she had noticed once before. With a convulsive clutching of the fingers he pulled the rug up about his chin. Davenant stood as he had been standing when she came in, his arm resting on the mantelpiece. When she looked at him with one hasty glance, she noticed that he reddened hotly.

"I've changed my mind," she went on, impelled by the silence of the other two to say something more. I've changed my mind. It's because of papa's clients—the Miss Rodmans and the others—that I've done it. I couldn't help it. I never thought of them till this afternoon. I don't know why. I've been very dense. I've been cruel. I've considered only how we—papa and I—could exonerate ourselves, if you can call it exoneration. I'm sorry."

"You couldn't be expected to think of everything at once, Miss Guion," Davenant said clumsily.

"I might have been expected to think of this; but I didn't. I suppose it's what you meant when you said that there were sides to the question that I didn't see. You said it too, papa. I wish you had spoken more plainly."

"We talked it over, Miss Guion. We didn't want

to seem to force you. It's the kind of thing that's better done when it's done of one's own impulse. We were sure you'd come to it. All the same, if you hadn't done it to-day, we'd made up our minds to—to suggest it. That's why I took the liberty of bringing these things. Those are bonds that you've got your hand on—and the cheques make up the sum total."

By an instinctive movement she snatched her fingers away; but, recovering herself, she took the package deliberately into her hands and stood holding it

"I've been explaining to Davenant," Guion said, in a muffled voice, "that things aren't quite so hopeless as they seem. If we ever come into Aunt Vic's money——"

"But there's no certainty of that, papa."

"No certainly, but a good deal of probability. She's always given us to understand that the money wouldn't go out of her own family; and there's practically no one left now but you and me. And if it *should* come to us, there'd be more than enough to—to square everything. You'd do it, dear, wouldn't you, if Aunt Vic were to leave the whole thing to you? I think she's as likely to do that as not."

"Mr. Davenant must know already that I shall give my whole life to trying to pay our debt. If there's anything I could sign at once——"

Davenant moved from the fireside. "There's nothing to sign, Miss Guion," he said briefly. "The matter is ended as far as I'm concerned. Mr. Guion has got the money, and is relieved from his most pressing embarrassments. That's all I care about. There's no reason why we should ever speak of it again. If you'll excuse me now——"

He turned towards the couch with his hand outstretched, but during the minute or two in which Olivia and he had been facing each other Guion had drawn the rug over his face. Beneath it there was a convulsive shaking, from which the younger man turned away.

With a nod of comprehension to Olivia he tiptoed softly from the room. As he did so he could see her kneel beside the couch and kiss the hand that lay outside the coverlet.

She overtook him, however, when he was downstairs picking up his hat and stick from the hall table.

She stood on the lowest step of the stairs, leaning on the low, white pillar that finished the balustrade. He was obliged to pass her on his way to the door. The minute was the more awkward for him owing to the fact that she did not take the initiative in carrying it off. On the contrary, she made it harder by looking at him gravely without speaking.

"It's relief," he said, nodding with understanding towards the room upstairs. "I've seen men do that before—after they'd been facing some danger or other with tremendous pluck."

He spoke for the sake of saying something, standing before her with his hat and stick in his hand, not seeing precisely how he was to get away.

"It's a relief to me too," she said simply. "You can't imagine what it's been the last few days—seeing things go to pieces like that. Now, I suppose, they'll hold together somehow, though it can't be very well. I dare say you think me all wrong——"

He shook his head.

"I couldn't see any other way. When you've done wrong as we've done it, you'd rather be punished. You don't want to go scot free. It's something like the kind of impulse that made the hermits and ascetics submit to scourging. But it's quite possible that I shouldn't have had the courage to go through with it—especially if papa had broken down. As you said from the first, I didn't see what was truly vital."

"I shouldn't blame myself too much for that, Miss Guion. It often happens that one only finds the right way by making two or three plunges into wrong ones."

"Do you think I've found it now?"

There was something wistful in the question, and not a little humble, that induced him to say with fervour, "I'm very sure of it."

"And you?" she asked. "Is it the right way for you?"

"Yes; and it's the first time I've ever struck it."

She shook her head slowly. "I don't know. I'm a little bewildered. This morning everything seemed so clear, and now—I understand," she went on, "that we shall be taking all you have."

"Who told you that?" he asked sharply.

"It doesn't matter who told me; but it's very important if we are. *Are* we?"

He threw his head back in a way that, notwithstanding her preoccupation, she could not but admire. "No; because I've still got my credit. When a man has that——"

"But you'll have to begin all over again, shan't you?"

"Only as a man who has won one battle begins all over again when he fights another. It's nothing but fun when you're fond of war."

"Didn't I do something very rude to you—once—a long time ago?"

The question took him so entirely unawares that, in the slight, involuntary movement he made, he seemed to himself to stagger backwards. He was aware of looking blank, while unable to control his features to a non-committal expression. He had the feeling that minutes had gone by before he was able to say—

"It was really of no consequence——"

"Don't say that. It was of great consequence. Anyone can see that—now. I was insolent. I knew I *had* been. You must have been perfectly aware of it all these years; and—I *will* say it!—I *must* say it!—you're taking your revenge—very nobly."

He was about to utter something in protest, but she turned away abruptly and sped up the stairs. On the

first landing she paused for the briefest instant and looked down.

"Good-bye," she faltered. "I must go back to papa. He'll need me. I can't talk any more just now. I'm too bewildered—about everything. Colonel Ashley will arrive in a day or two, and after I've seen him I shall be a little clearer as to what I think; and—and then—I shall see you again."

He continued to stand gazing up the stairway long after he had heard her close the door of Guion's room behind her.

XI

IT was not difficult for Davenant to ascribe his lightness of heart, on leaving Tory Hill, to satisfaction in getting rid of his superfluous money, since he had some reason to fear that the possession of it was no great blessing. To a man with little instinct for luxury and no spending tastes, twenty or thirty thousand dollars a year was an income far outstripping his needs. It was not, however, in excess of his desires, for he would gladly have set up an establishment and cut a dash if he had known how. He admired the grand style in living, not so much as a matter of display, because presumably it stood for all sorts of mysterious refinements for which he possessed the yearning without the initiation. The highest flight he could take by his own unaided efforts was in engaging the best suite of rooms in the best hotel, when he was quite content with his dingy old lodgings; in driving in taxi-cabs, when the tramcar would have suited him just as well, and ordering champagne when he would have preferred some commoner beverage. Fully aware of the insufficiency of this method of reaching a higher standard, he practised it only because it offered the readiest means he could find of straining upwards. He was sure that with a wife who knew the arts of elegance to lead the

way his scent for following would be keen enough; but between him and the acquisition of this treasure there lay the memory of this haughty young creature who had, in the metaphor with which he was most familiar, "turned him down."

But it was not the fact that he had more money than he needed of which he was afraid; it was rather the perception that the possibility of indulging himself, coupled with what he conceived to be a kind of duty in doing it, was sapping his vigour. All through the second year of his holiday he had noticed in himself the tendency of the big, strong-fibred animal to be indolent and overfed. On the principle laid down by Emerson that every man is as lazy as he dares to be, he got into the way of sleeping late, of lounging in the public places of hotels, and smoking too many cigars. With a little encouragement he could have contracted the incessant cocktail and Scotch-and-soda habits of some of his travelling compatriots.

He excused these weaknesses on the ground that when he had returned to Boston, and got back to his ordinary round of work and exercise, they would vanish without having to be overcome; and yet the nearer he drew to his old home, the less impulse he felt for exertion. He found himself asking the question, "Why should I try to make more money when I've got enough already?" to which the only reply was in that vague hope of "doing a little good," inspired by his visit to the scene of his parents' work at Hankow. In this direction, however, his aptitudes were more spontaneous than they were for the life of cultivated taste. Henry Guion's need struck him, therefore, as an opportunity. If he took other views of it besides, if it made to him an appeal totally different from the altruistic, he was able to conceal the fact—from himself at any rate—in the depths of a soul where much that was vital to the man was always held in subliminal darkness. It disturbed him, then, to have Drusilla Fane rifle this sanctuary with

irreverent persistency, dragging to light what he had kept scrupulously hidden away.

Having found her alone in the drawing-room drinking her tea, he told her at once what he had accomplished in the way of averting the worst phase of the danger hanging over the master of Tory Hill. He told her, too, with some amount of elation, which he explained as his glee in getting himself down to "hard-pan." Drusilla allowed the explanation to pass till she had thanked him ecstatically for what he had done.

"Really, Peter, men are fine! The minute I heard Cousin Henry's wretched story I knew the worst couldn't come to the worst, with you here. I only wish you could realize what it means to have a big, strong man like you to lean on."

Davenant looked pleased; he was in the mood to be pleased with anything. He had had so little of women's appreciation in his life that Drusilla's enthusiasm was not only agreeable but new. He noticed, too, that in speaking Drusilla herself was at her best. She had never been pretty. Her mouth was too large, her cheek-bones too high, and her skin too sallow for that; but she had the charm of frankness and intelligence.

Davenant said what was necessary in depreciation of his act, going on to explain the benefit he would reap by being obliged to go to work again. He enlarged on his plans for taking his old rooms and his old office, and informed her that he knew a fellow, an old pall, who had a ready let him into a good thing in the way of a copper mine in the region of Lake Superior. Drusilla listened with interest till she found an opportunity to say—

"I m so glad that *is* your reason for helping Cousin Henry, Peter; because I was afraid there might be—another."

He stopped abruptly, looking dashed. Unaccustomed to light methods of attack and defence, it took him a few seconds to see Drusilla's move.

"You thought I might be—in love?"

She nodded.

"That's queer," he went on, "because I'd got the same impression about you."

It was Drusilla's turn to be aghast. She was a little surprised at not being offended, too.

"What made you think that?" she managed to ask, after getting command of herself.

"What makes one think anything? However," he conceded, "I dare say I'm wrong."

"That's a very good conclusion to come to. I advise you to keep to it."

"I will if you'll do the same about me."

She seized the opening to carry the attack back in his direction.

"I can't make a bargain of that kind, Peter. The scientific mind bases its conclusion on—observed phenomena."

"Which I guess is the reason why the scientific mind is so often wrong. I've had a good deal to do with it in the copper-mine business. It's always barking up the wrong tree. I've often heard it said that the clever scientist is generally a poor reasoner."

"Well, perhaps he is. But I wasn't reasoning. I was merely going by instinct when I thought you might have a special motive for helping Cousin Henry. If you had, you know, it wouldn't be any harm."

"It mightn't be any harm; but would it be any good?"

"Well, that might depend a good deal—on you."

"On me? How so? I don't know what you're driving at."

"I'm not driving at anything. I'm only speculating. I'm wondering what I should do if I were in your place—with all your advantages."

"Rot, Drusilla!"

"If I were a man and had a rival," Drusilla persisted, "I should be awfully honourable in the stand I'd take toward him—just like you. But if anything miscarried——"

"You don't *expect* anything to miscarry?"

She shook her head. "No; I don't expect it. But it might be a fortunate thing if it did."

"You don't mean to infer that this man Ashley mightn't come up to the scratch?"

"Colonel Ashley has come up to a good many scratches in his time. He's not likely to fail in this one."

"Well, then, what more is there to it?"

"There's a good deal more. There are things I can't explain, and which you wouldn't understand if I did. Coming up to the scratch isn't everything. Charles the First came up to the scratch when he walked up and had his head cut off; but there was more to be said."

"And you mean that your Colonel Ashley would be brave enough to walk up and have *his* head cut off?"

"I know he'd be brave enough. It's no question of courage. He had the Victoria Cross before he was thirty. But it's a noble head; and it might be a pity it should have to fall."

"But I don't understand why it should."

"No, you wouldn't unless you'd lived among them. They'd all admit he had done the right thing. They'd say that, having come out here to marry her, he could do no less than go through with it. That part of it would be all right. Even in the Rifles it might make comparatively little difference—except that now and then Olivia would feel uncomfortable. Only when he was mentioned at the Horse Guards for some important command they'd remember that there was something queer—something shady—about his wife's family, and his name would be passed over."

He nodded thoughtfully. "I see."

"Oh no, you don't. It's much too intricate for you to see. You couldn't begin to understand how poignant it might become, especially for her, without knowing their ways and traditions——"

He jumped to his feet. "Their ways and traditions be——!"

"Yes; that's all very fine. But they're very good ways, Peter. They've got to keep the honour of the Service up to a very high standard. Their ways are all right. But that doesn't keep them from being terrible forces to come up against, especially for a proud thing like her. And now that the postponing of the wedding has got into the papers——"

"Yes; I've seen 'em. Got it pretty straight, too, all things considered."

"And that sort of thing simply flies. It will be in the New York papers to-morrow, and in the London ones the day after. We always get those things cabled over there. We know about the elopements and the queer things that happen in America when we don't hear of anything else. Within forty-eight hours they'll be talking of it at the Rifles' depot in Sussex—and at Heneage—and all through his county—and at the Horse Guards. You see if they aren't! You've no idea how people have their eye on him. And when they hear the wedding has been put off for a scandal they'll have at their heels all the men who've hated him—and all the women who've envied her——"

He leaned his shoulders against the mantelpiece, his hands behind his back. "Pooh! That sort of dog can only bark."

"No; that's where you're wrong, Peter. In England it can bite. It can raise a to-do around their name that will put a dead stop to his promotion—that is, the best kind of promotion, such as he's on the way to."

"The deuce take his promotion! Let's think of—*her*."

"That's just what I thought you'd do, Peter; and with all your advantages——"

"Drop that, Drusilla," he commanded. "You know you don't mean it. You know as well as I do that I haven't a chance—even if I wanted one—which I don't. You're not thinking of me—or of her. You're thinking of him—and how to get him out of a match that won't tend to his advancement."

"I'm thinking of every one, Peter—of every one but myself, that is. I'm thinking of him, and her, and you——"

"Then you'll do me a favour if you leave me out."

She sprang to her feet, her little figure looking slim and girlish.

"I can't leave you out, Peter, when you're the Hamlet of the piece. That's nonsense. I'm not plotting or planning on any one's behalf. It isn't my temperament. I only say that if this—this affair—didn't come off—though I suppose it will—I feel sure it will—yet if it didn't—then, with all your advantages—and after what you've done for her——"

He strode forward, almost upsetting the tea-table beside which she stood. "Look here, Drusilla. You may as well understand me once for all. I wouldn't marry a girl who took me because of what I'd done for her not if she was the last woman in the world."

"But you would if she was the first, Peter. And I'm convinced that for you she *is* the first——"

"Now, now!" he warned her, "that'll do! I've been generous enough not to say anything as to who's first with you, though you don't take much pains to hide it. Why not——?"

"You're all first with me," she protested. "I don't know which of you I'm the most sorry for."

"Don't waste your pity on me. I'm perfectly happy. There's only one of the lot who needs any consideration whatever. And by God! if he's not true to her, I'll——"

"Your intervention won't be called for, Peter," she assured him, making her way toward the door. "You're greatly mistaken if you think I've asked for it."

"Then for Heaven's sake what *have* you asked for? *I* don't see."

She was in the hall, but she turned and spoke through the doorway. "I've only asked you not to be an idiot. I merely beg, for all our sakes, that if something precious

s flung down at your feet you'll have the common sense :o stoop and pick it up."

" I'll consider that," he called after her, as she sped up :he stairs, " when I see it lying there."

XII

IT may be admitted at once that, on arriving at Tory Hill and hearing from Olivia's lips the tale of her father's downfall, Colonel Rupert Ashley received the first perceptible check in a very distinguished career. Up to this point the sobriquet of "Lucky Ashley," by which he was often spoken of in the Rifles, had been justified by more than one spectacular success. He had fulfilled so many special missions to uncivilized and half-civilized and queerly civilized tribes that he had come to feel as if he habitually went on his way with the might of the British Empire to back him. It was he who in South Africa brought the M'popos to order without shedding a drop of blood; it was he who in the eastern Sudan induced the followers of the Black Prophet to throw in their lot with the English, securing by this move the safety of Upper Egypt; it was he who in the Malay Peninsula intimidated the Sultan of Surak into accepting the British protectorate, thus removing a menace to the peace of the Straits Settlements. Even if he had had no other exploits to his credit, these alone would have assured his favour with the home authorities. It had become something like a habit at the Colonial Office or the War Office or the Foreign Office, as the case might be, whenever there was trouble on one of the Empire's vague outer frontiers, to ask, " Where's Ashley? " Wherever he was, at Gibraltar or Simla or Cairo or at the Rifles' depot in Sussex, he was sent for and consulted. Once having gained a reputation for skill in handling barbaric poten-

tates, he knew how to make the most of it, both abroad and in Whitehall. On rejoining his regiment, too, after some of his triumphant expeditions, he was careful to bear himself with a modesty that took the point from detraction, assuring, as it did, his brother-officers that they would have done as well as he, had they enjoyed the same chances.

He was not without a policy in this, since from the day of receiving his commission he had combined a genuine love of his profession with a quite laudable intention to "get on." He cherished this ambition more naturally, perhaps, than most of his comrades, who took the profession of arms lightly, for the reason that the instinct for it might be said to be in his blood. The Ashleys were not an old county family. Indeed, it was only a generation or so since they had achieved county rank. It was a fact not generally remembered at the present day that the grandfather of the colonel of the Sussex Rifles had been a successful and estimable manufacturer of brushes. In the early days of Queen Victoria he owned a much-frequented emporium in Regent Street, at which you could get anything in the line from a tooth-brush to a currycomb. Retiring from business in the fifties, with a considerable fortune for the time, this Mr. Ashley had purchased Heneage from the impoverished representatives of the Umfravilles. As luck would have it, the new owners found a not unattractive Miss Umfraville almost going with the place, since she lived in select but inexpensive lodgings in the village. Her manners being as gentle as her blood, and her face even gentler than either, if such a thing could be, it was in keeping with the spirit that had borne the Ashleys along to look upon her as an opportunity.

Young Mr Ashley, to whom his father had been able to give the advantages of Oxford, knew at a glance that with this lady at his side recognition by the county would be assured. Being indifferent to recognition by the county except in so far as it expressed a phase of

advancement, and superior to calculation as a motive for the matrimonial state, young Ashley proceeded with due formality to fall in love; and it was from the passion incidental to this episode that Lucky Ashley was born.

All this had happened so long ago, according to modern methods of reckoning, that the county had already forgotten what it was the original Ashley had manufactured, or that he had manufactured anything at all. By the younger generation it was assumed that Heneage had passed to the Ashley family through intermarriage with the Umfravilles. Certain it was that the Ashleys maintained the Umfraville tradition and used the Umfraville arms. What chiefly survived of the spirit that had made the manufacture of brushes so lucrative a trade was the intention young Rupert Ashley took with him into the army—to get on.

He had got on. Every one spoke of him nowadays as a coming man. It was conceded that when generals ke Lord Englemere or Lord Bannockburn passed away, it would be to such men as Rupert Ashley—the number of them could be counted on the fingers of your two hands!—that the country would look for its defenders. They were young men, comparatively, as yet; but they were waiting and in training. It was a national asset to know that they were there

It was natural, then, that Ashley's eyes should be turning in the direction of the great appointments. He had won so much distinction in the Jakh War and the Dargai War that there was nothing to which, with time, he could not aspire. True, he had rivals; true, there were men who could supplant him without putting any great strain upon their powers; true, there were others with more family influence, especially of that petticoat influence which had been known to carry so much weight in high and authoritative quarters; but he had confidence in himself, in his ability, his star—the last named of which had the merit of always seeming to move forward.

Everything began to point, therefore, to his marrying. In a measure it was part of his qualification for high command. He had reached that stage in his development, both private and professional, at which the co-operation of a good and graceful wife would double his capacity for public service, besides giving him that domestic consolation of which he began to feel the need. There were posts he could think of—posts that would naturally be vacant before many years were past—in which the fact of his being unmarried would be a serious drawback if his name were to come up. Better to be unmarried than to be saddled with a wife who from any deficiency of birth or manner was below the level of her station! Of course! He had seen more than one man splendidly qualified otherwise, passed over because of that mischance. But with a wife who in her way was equal to him in his they would both go far. Who could venture to say how far?

In this respect he was fortunate in knowing exactly what he wanted. That is, he had seen enough of the duties of high position to be critical of the ladies who performed them. Experience enabled him to create his ideal by a process of elimination. Many a time, as he watched some great general's wife—Lady Englemere, let us say, or Lady Bannockburn—receive her guests, he said to himself, "That is exactly what my wife shall not be." She should not be a military *intrigante* like the one, nor a female martinet like the other, nor a gambler like a third, not a snob like a fourth, nor a fool about young men like several he could think of. By dint of fastidious observation and careful rejection of the qualities of which he disapproved, a vision rose before him of the woman who would be the complement of himself. He saw her clever, spirited, high-bred—a woman of the world, familiar with literature and arts, and speaking at least one language besides her mother-tongue. In dress she should be exquisite, in conversation tactful, in manner sympathetic. As mistress of the

house she should be thorough; as a hostess, full of charm; as a mother—but his imagination hardly went into that. That she should be a perfect mother he took for granted, just as he took it for granted that she should be beautiful. A woman who had the qualifications he desired could not be less than beautiful from the sheer operation of the soul.

Considering how definite his ideas were—and moderate, on the whole—it surprised him to find no one to embody them. It sometimes seemed to him that the traditional race of Englishwomen had become extinct. Those he met were either brilliant and hard, or handsome and horsey, or athletic and weedy, or smart and selfish, or pretty and silly, or sweet and provincial, or good and grotesque. With the best will in the world to fall in love, he found little or no temptation. Indeed, he had begun to think that the type of woman on whom he had set his heart was, like some article of an antiquated fashion, no longer produced, when unexpectedly he saw her.

He saw her unexpectedly, because it was at church; and whatever his motives on that bright Sunday morning in May in attending the old garrison chapel in Southsea, the hope of seeing his vision realised was not one. If, apart from the reasons for which people are supposed to go to church, he had any special thought, it was that of meeting Mrs. Fane. It had happened two or three times already that, having perceived her at the service, he had joined her on the Common afterwards, and she had asked him home to lunch. They had been pleasant little luncheons—so pleasant that he almost regretted the fact that she was an American. He had nothing against Americans in themselves. He knew a number of their women who had married into one arm or another of the Service with conspicuous advantage to their husbands. That, in fact, was part of the trouble. There were so many of them nowadays that he had begun to feel vaguely that where there was question of high position—

and he hoped modestly that in his case there was distinctly question of that—it was time the principle was being established of England for the English. Nevertheless, he had got so far in his consideration of Drusilla Fane as to ask himself whether she was not, as the widow of a British officer, an English-woman to all intents and purposes as well as in the strict letter of the law. He could not say that he was in love with her; but neither could he say that one of these days he might not be. I he ever were it would certainly be on the principle of *faute de mieux;* but many a man has chosen his wife on no better ground than that.

Such criticism as he had to make to her disadvantage he could form there and then in the chapel while they were reading the lessons or chanting the psalms. She sat two or three rows in front of him, on the other side of the aisle. There was something about Drusilla in church that suggested a fish out of water. He had noticed it before. She was restless, inattentive; she kept turning her head to see who was behind her or at the other end of the pew; she rarely found the places in the prayer-book or knew just when to kneel down; when she did kneel down she sank into an awkward l ttle bunch; every now and then she stifled, or did not stifle a yawn.

Ashley had a theory that manner in church is the supreme test of the proprieties. He knew plenty of women who could charm at a dinner or dazzle at a dance, but who displayed their weaknesses at prayer. A l unwitting to herself, poor Drusilla was inviting his final—or almost final—judgment on her future, so far at least as he was concerned, for the simple reason that she twitched and sighed and forgot to say the Amens.

And just then his eyes travelled to her neighbour —a tall young lady, dressed in white, with no colour in her costume but a sash of hues trembling between sea-green and lilac. She was slender and graceful, with that air at once exquisite and unassuming that he had

en in the Englishwoman of his dreams. Though e could get no more than a side glimpse of her face, e divined that it was pure and that it must be thrown ito relief by the heavy coil of coppery-brown hair. ut what he noticed in her first was that which he ought of concerning other women last—a something oly and withdrawn, a quality of devotion without which e had no conception of real womanhood. It seemed o be a matter of high courtesy with her not to perceive hat the choir-boys sang out of tune or that the sermon as prosy. In the matter of kneeling he had seen nly one woman in his life—and she the highest in he land—who did it with this marvellous grace, at once ignified and humble. "It takes old England," he said o himself gloatingly, "to make 'em like that—simple nd—*stunning*."

But on the Common after service, and at luncheon fter that, and during the three or four weeks that nsued, he had much to do in re-forming his opinions. 'here were several facts about Olivia Guion that disrientated his points of view and set him looking for ew ones. Though he was not wholly successful in nding them, he managed, nevertheless, to justify himelf for falling in love in violation of his principles. He dmitted that he would have preferred to marry a comatriot of his own, and some one above the rank of solicitor's daughter; but, since he had discovered he loveliest and noblest creature in the world, it was ile to cavil because one land or one situation in life ather than another had produced her. As well comlain of the rubies and pearls that deck the English rown because some were found in Tibetan mountains nd others in Indian seas. There are treasures, he rgued, so precious as to transcend all merely national nitations, making them petty and irrelevant. The ne thing to the point was that in Olivia Guion he ad won the human counterpart of himself, who could eflect his qualities and complete them.

He had been so proud that the blow on receiving Olivia's letter in New York was a cruel one. Though it told him nothing but that her father had lost all his money and that the invitations to the wedding had been withdrawn, this in itself was immeasurably distressing to a man with a taste for calling public attention to his movements, and who liked to see what concerned him march with a certain pomp. His marriage being an event worthy to take place in sight of the world, he had not only found ways of making it a topic of interest before leaving England, but he had summoned to it such friends of distinction as he possessed on the American side of the water. Though he had not succeeded in getting the British Ambassador, Benyon, the military attaché at Washington, was to come with his wife and Lord Woolwich, who was aide-de-camp at Ottawa, had promised to act as best man. His humiliation on speculating as to what they must have said when they received Olivia's card announcing that the marriage was not to take place on the 28th was such that he fell to wondering whether it wouldn't have been better to bluff the loss of money. They might have carried out their plans in spite of it. Indeed, he felt the feasibility of this course the more strongly after he had actually seen Olivia and she had given him the outlines of her tale.

Watching his countenance closely, she saw that he blanched. Otherwise he betrayed no sign of flinching. His manner of sitting rigid and upright in his corner of the rustic seat was a perfectly natural way of listening to a story that affected him so closely. What distressed her chiefly was the incongruity between his personality and the sordid drama in which she was inviting him to take part. He was even more distinguished-looking than he appeared in the photographs she cherished or in the vision she had retained in her memory. Without being above the medium male height, he was admirably shaped by war, sport, and exercise. His neat head

with its thick, crispy hair, in which there was already a streak of grey, was set on his shoulders at just the right poise for command. The high-bridged nose, inherited from the Umfravilles, was of the kind commonly considered to show "race." The eyes had the sharpness and the thin-lipped mouth the inflexibility, that go with a capacity for quick decisions. While he was not so imposing in mufti as in his uniform, the trim travelling-suit of russet brown went well with the bronze tint of the complexion. It was so healthy a bronze, as a usual thing, that his present pallor was the more ashen from contrast.

Knowing from his telegram the hour at which to expect him, she had gone down the driveway to meet him when she saw him dismiss his taxicab at the gate. She chose to do this in order that their first encounter might take place out-of-doors. With the windows of the neighbouring houses open and people sitting on verandas or passing up and down the road, they could exchange no more than some conventional greeting. She would assume nothing on the ground of their past standing toward each other. He seemed to acquiesce in this, since he showed no impatience at being restricted to the formality of shaking hands

Happily for both, commonplace words were given them—questions and answers as to his voyage, his landing, his hotel. He came to her relief, too, as they encountered toward the house, by commenting on its dignity and Georgian air, as well as by turning once or twice to look at the view. Nearing the steps she swerved from the gravelled driveway and began to cross the lawn.

"We won't go in just yet," she explained. "Papa is there. He felt he ought to dress and come downstairs to receive you. He's very far from well. I hope you'll do your best not to—to think of him too harshly."

"I shouldn't think harshly of any one simply because he'd had business bad luck."

"He *has* had business bad luck—but that isn't all. We'll sit here."

Taking one corner of a long garden-seat that stood in the shade of an elm, she signed to him to take the other. On the left they had the Corinthian-columned portico of the garden front of the house; in the distance the multicoloured slopes of the town. Olivia, at least, felt the stimulating effect of the golden forenoon sunshine.

As for Ashley, in spite of his outward self-possession, he was too bewildered to feel anything at all. Having rushed on from New York by night, he was now getting his first daylight glimpse of America; and, though, owing to more urgent subjects for thought, he was not consciously giving his attention to things outward, he had an oppressive sense of immensity and strangeness. The arch of the sky was so sweeping, the prospect before them so gorgeous, the sunlight so hard, and the distances so clear! For the first time in his life a new continent aroused in him an odd sense of antagonism. He had never had it in Africa or Asia or in the isles of the Southern Sea. There he had always gone with a sense of power, with the instinct of the conqueror; while here. . . But Olivia was speaking, saying things too appalling for immediate comprehension.

Her voice was gentle and even; she spoke with a certain kind of ease. She appeared to rehearse something already learned by heart.

"So you see, he didn't merely lose his own money; he lost theirs—the money of his clients—which was in his trust. I hadn't heard of it when I wrote you in New York, otherwise I should have told you. But now that you know it——"

He looked mystified. "He's jolly lucky not to be in England," he said, trying not to seem as stunned as he felt. "There that sort of thing is a very serious——"

"Offence," she hastened to say. "Oh, so it is here.

I must tell you quite plainly that if the money hadn't come papa would have had to go to——"

"But the money did come?"

She made a point of finishing her sentence. "If the money hadn't come papa would have had to go to prison. Yes, the money did come. A friend of—of papa's—and Drusilla's—advanced it. It's been paid over to the people who were going to law."

"So that part of it is settled?"

"That part of it is settled to the extent that no action will be taken against papa."

She continued to talk on gently, evenly, giving him the facts unsparingly. It was the only way. Her very statements, so it seemed to her, implied that as marriage between them was no longer possible their engagement was at an end.

She was not surprised that he scarcely noticed when, having said all she had to say, she ceased speaking. Taking it for granted that he was thinking out the most merciful way of putting his verdict into words, she, too, remained silent. She was not impatient, nor uneasy, nor alarmed. The fact that the business of telling him was no longer ahead of her, that she had got it over, brought so much relief that she felt able to await his pleasure.

She mistook, however, the nature of his thoughts. Once he had grasped the gist of her information, he paid little attention to its details. The important thing was his own conduct. Amid circumstances overwhelmingly difficult he must act so that every one, friend or rival, relative, county magnate or brother officer, the man in his regiment or the member of his club, the critic in England or the onlooker in America, should say he had done precisely the right thing.

He used the words "precisely the right thing" because they formed a ruling phrase in his career. For twenty-odd years they had been written on the tablets of his heart and worn as frontlets between his brows.

They had first been used in connection with him by a great dowager countess now deceased. She had said to his mother, apropos of some forgotten bit of courtliness on his part, "You can always be sure that Rupert will do precisely the right thing." Though he was but a lad at Eton at the time, he had been so proud of this opinion, expressed with all a dowager countess's authority, that from the moment it was repeated to him by his mother he made it a device. It had kept him out of more scrapes than he could reckon up, and had even inspired the act that would make his name glorious as long as there were annals of the Victoria Cross.

He had long been persuaded that had the dowager countess not thus given the note to his character his record would never have been written on that roll of heroes. "I should have funked it," was his way of putting it, by which he meant that he would have funked it through sheer ignorance of himself and of his aptitude for the high and noble. It was an aptitude that flourished best under an appreciative eye—of the dowager countess looking down from heaven—or of the discerning here on earth—as an actor is encouraged by a sympathetic public to his highest histrionic efforts. If there was anything histrionic in Ashley himself, it was only in the sense that he was at his finest when, actually or potentially, there was some one there to see. He had powers then of doing precisely the right thing which in solitude might have been dormant from lack of motive.

It was undoubtedly because he felt the long-sighted eyes of England on him that he had done precisely the right thing in winning the Victoria Cross. He confessed this—to himself. He confessed it often—every time, in fact, when he came to a difficult passage in his life. It was his strength, his inspiration. He confessed it now. If he sat silent while Olivia Guion waited till it seemed good to him to speak, it was only that he might remind himself of the advantages of doing the right thing, however hard. He had tested those advantages

time and time again. The very memories they raised were a rebuke to weakness and hesitation. If he ever had duties he was inclined to shirk, he thought of that half-hour which had for ever set the seal upon his reputation as a British soldier.

He thought of it now. He saw himself again looking up at the bristling cliffs that were to be rushed, whence the Afridis were pouring their deadly fire. He saw himself measuring with his eye the saddle of precipitous slope that had to be crossed, devoid of cover and strewn with the bodies of dead Gurkhas. Of the actual crossing, with sixty of his men behind him, he had little or no recollection. He had passed under the hail of bullets as through perils in a dream. As in a dream, too, he remembered seeing his men, when he turned to cheer them on, go down like ninepins—throwing up their arms and staggering, or twisting themselves up like convulsive cats. It was grotesque rather than horrible; he felt himself grinning inwardly, as at something hellishly comic, when he reached the group of Gurkhas huddled under the cavernous shelter of the cliff. Then, just as he threw himself on the ground, panting like a spent dog and feeling his body all over to know whether or not he had been wounded, he saw poor Private Vickerson out in the open, thirty yards from the protection of the wall of rock. While the other Rifles to a man were lying still, on the back with the knees drawn up, or face downward with the arms outstretched, or rolled on the side as though they were in bed, Vickerson was rising on his hands and dragging himself forward. It was one of Ashley's most vivid recollections that Vickerson's movements were like a seal's. They had the drollery of a bit of infernal mimicry. It was also a vivid recollection that when he ran out to the soldier's aid he had his first sensation of fear. The bullets whizzed so thick about him that he ran back again. It was an involuntary running back, as involuntary as snatching his fingers out of a fire. He could remember standing

under the rock, and, as Vickerson did not move, hal hoping he were dead. That would put an end to an further attempts to save him. But the soldier stirre again, propping himself with both hands and pullin his body onward for a few inches more. Again Ashle ran out into a tempest of iron and fire and over groun slippery with blood. He could still feel himself hoppin back, as a barefooted boy who has ventured into snowstorm hops back into the house. A third tim he ran out, and a fourth. At the fourth he distinctl worded the thought which had been at the back of hi mind from the beginning, " I shall get the V.C. for this.' He tried to banish the unworthy suggestion, but it wa too strong for him. Over the cliffs, and out of the clouds and from beyond the horizon, he felt the unseen eyes o England upon him, inciting him to such a valour tha at the fifth attempt he dragged in his man.

He came out of this reverie, which, after all, was brief to find the gentle tones in which Olivia had made he astounding revelations still in his ears, while she her self sat expectant and resigned. He knew she wa expectant and resigned and that she had braced he courage for the worst. With many men, with mos men, to do so would have been needful. In the con fusion of his rapid summaries and calculations it was pleasurable thought that she should learn from hin and through him and in him, that it was not so wit all. The silence which at first was inadvertent no became deliberate as—while he noted with satisfactio that he had not overstated to himself the exquisit restrained beauty of her features, her eyes, her hai her hands, and of the very texture and fashion of he clothing—he prolonged the suspense which was to b the prelude to his justifying once again the dowage countess's good opinion. It was to his credit as a brav man that he could nerve himself for this with his eye wide open—wider open than even Mrs. Fane's—to th consequences that might be in store for him.

XIII

ASHLEY had the tact, sprung of his English instinct for moderation, not to express his good intentions too directly. He preferred to let them filter out through a seemingly casual manner of taking them for granted. Neither did he attempt to disguise the fact that the strangeness incidental to meeting again, in trying conditions and under another sky, created between himself and Olivia a kind of moral distance across which they could draw together only by degrees. It was a comfort to her that he did not try to bridge it by anything in the way of forced tenderness. He was willing to talk over the situation simply and quietly until, in the course of an hour or two, the sense of separation begun to wear away.

The necessity on her part of presenting Ashley to her father and offering him lunch brought into play those social resources that were as second nature to all three. It was difficult to think the bottom could be out of life while going through a carefully chosen menu and drinking an excellent vin de Graves at a table meticulously well appointed. To escape the irony of this situation they took refuge in the topics that came readiest, the novelty to Ashley of the outward aspect of American things keeping them on safe ground till the meal was done. It was a relief to both men that Guion could make his indisposition an excuse for retiring again to his room.

It was a relief to Olivia, too. For the first time in her life she had to recognize her father as insupportable to any one but herself and Peter Davenant. Ashley did his best to conceal his repulsion; she was sure of that; he only betrayed it negatively in a tendency to ignore him. He neither spoke nor listened to him any more than he could help. By keeping his eyes on

Olivia he avoided looking towards him. The fact that Guion took this aversion humbly, his head hanging and his attention given to his plate, did not make it the less poignant.

All the same, as soon as they were alone in the dining-room the old sense of intimacy, of belonging to each other, suddenly returned. It returned apropos of nothing and with the exchange of a glance. There was a flash in his eyes, a look of wonder in hers—and he had taken her, or she had slipped, into his arms.

And yet when a little later he reverted to the topic of the morning and said, "As things are now, I really don't see why we shouldn't be married on the 28th—privately, you know," her answer was, "What did you think of papa?"

Though he raised his eyebrows in surprise that she should introduce the subject, he managed to say, "He seems pretty game."

"He does; but I dare say he isn't as game as he looks. There's a good deal before him still."

"If we're married on the 28th he'd have one care the less."

"Because I should be taken off his hands. I'm afraid that's not the way to look at it. The real fact is that he'd have nobody to help him."

"I've two month's leave. You could do a lot for him in that time.

She bent over her piece of work. It was the sofa-cushion she had laid aside on the day when she learned from Davenant that her father's troubles were like Jack Berrington's. They had come back for coffee to the rustic seat on the lawn. For the cups and coffee service a small table had been brought out, beside which she sat Ashley had so far recovered his sang-froid as to be able to enjoy a cigar.

'Would you be very much hurt," she asked, without raising her head, "if I begged you to go back to England without our being married at all?"

"Oh, but I say!"

The protest was not over-strong. He was neither shocked nor surprised. A well-bred woman, finding herself in such trouble as hers, would naturally offer him some way of escape from it.

"You see," she went on, "things are so complicated already that if we got married we should complicate them more. There's so much to be done—as to papa—and this house—and the future—of the kind of thing you don't know anything about. They're sordid things, too, that you'd be wasted on if you tried to learn them."

He smiled indulgently. "And so you're asking me—a so dier!—to run away."

'No, to let me do it. It's so—so impossible that I can't face it."

"Oh, nonsense!" He spoke with kindly impatience. "Don't you love me? You said just now—in the dining-room—when——"

"Yes, I know; I did say that. But, you see—we *must* consider it—love can't be the most important thing in the world for either you or me."

"I understand. You mean to say it's duty. Very good. In that case, my duty is as plain as a pikestaff."

"Your duty to stand by me?"

"I should be a hound if I didn't do it."

"And I should feel myself a common adventuress if I were to let you."

"Oh—I say!"

His protest this time was more emphatic. There was even a pleading note in it. In the course of two or three hours he had got back much of the feeling he had had in England that she was more than an exquisite lady, that she was the other part of himself. It seemed superfluous on her part to fling open the way of retreat for him too wide.

She smiled at his exclamation. "Yes, I dare say that's how it strikes you. But it's very serious to me. Isn't it serious to you, too, to feel that you must be

true to me—and marry me—after all that's come to pass?"

"One doesn't think that way—or speak that way—of marrying the woman one—adores."

"Men have been known to marry the women they adored, and still regret the consequences they had to meet."

"She's right," he said to himself. "It is serious."

There could be no question as to her wisdom in asking him to pause. At his age and in his position, and with his merely normal capacity for passion, it would be absurd to call the world well lost for love. Notwithstanding his zeal to do the right thing, there was something due to himself, and it was imperative that he should consider it. Dropping the stump of his cigar into his empty coffee-pot, he got up and strode away. The emotion of the minute, far in excess of the restrained phrases convention taught them to use, offered an excuse for his unceremoniousness.

He walked to the other side of the lawn, then down to the gate, then round to the front of the house. To a chance passer-by he was merely inspecting the premises. What he saw, however, was not the spectacular foliage, nor the mellow Georgian dwelling, but himself going on his familiar victorious way, freed from a clogging scandal that would make the wheels of his triumphal car drive heavily. He saw himself advancing, as he had advanced hitherto, from promotion to promotion, from command to command. He saw himself first alone and then with a wife—a wife who was not Olivia Guion. Then suddenly the vision changed into something misty and undefined; the road became dark, the triumphal car jolted and fell to pieces; there was reproach in the air and discomfort in his sensations. He recognized the familiar warnings that he was not doing precisely the right thing. He saw Olivia Guion sitting as he had left her four or five minutes before, her head bent over her stitching. He saw her there, deserted, alone. He

saw the eyes of England on him, as he drove away in his triumphal car, leaving her to her fate. His compunction was intense, his pity overwhelming. Merely at turning his back on her to stroll around the lawn he felt guilty of a cowardly abandonment. And he felt something else—he felt the clinging of her arms around his neck; he felt the throb of her bosom against his own as she let herself break down just for a second—just for a sob. It seemed to him that he should feel that throb for ever.

He hurried back to where he had left her. "It's no use," he said to himself; "I'm in for it, by Jove! I simply can't leave her in the lurch."

There was no formal correctness about Ashley's habitual speech. He kept, as a rule, to the idiom of the mess, giving it distinction by his crisp, agreeable enunciation.

Olivia had let the bit of embroidery rest idly in her lap. She looked up at his approach. He stood before her.

"Do I understand," he asked, with a roughness assumed to conceal his agitation, "that you're offering me my liberty?"

"No; that I'm asking you for mine."

"On what grounds?"

She arched her eyebrows, looking round about her comprehensively. "I should think that was clear. On the grounds of—of everything."

"That's not enough. So long as you can't say that you don't—don't care about me any more——"

There was that possibility. It was very faint, but if she made use of it he should consider it decisive. Doing precisely the right thing would become quite another course of action if her heart rejected him. But she spoke promptly.

"I can't say that; but I can say something more important."

He nodded firmly. "That settles it, by Jove! I

shan't give you up. There's no reason for it. So long as we love each other——"

"Our loving each other wouldn't make your refusal any the less hard for me. As your wife I should be trying to fill a position for which I'm no longer qualified and in which I should be a failure."

"As my wife," he said slowly, with significant deliberation, "we could make the position anything you felt able to fill."

She considered this. "That is, you could send in your papers and retire into private life."

"If we liked."

"So that you'd be choosing between your career—and me."

"I object to the way of putting it. If my career, as you call it, didn't make you happy, you should have whatever would do the trick."

"I'm afraid you'll think me captious if I say that nothing *could do* it. If you weren't happy, I couldn't be; and you'd never be happy except as a soldier."

"That trade would be open to me whatever happened."

"In theory yes; but in practice, if you had a wife who was under a cloud, you'd have to go under it, too. That's what it would come to in the working out."

She stood up from sheer inability to continue sitting still. The piece of embroidery fell on the grass. Ashley smiled at her—a smile that was not wholly forced, because of the thoughts with which she inspired him. Her poise, her courage, the something in her that would have been pride if it had not been nearer to meekness, and which he had scarcely called meekness before he felt it to be fortitude, gave him confidence in the future. "She's stunning—by Jove!" It seemed to him that he saw her for the first time. For the first time since he had known her he was less the ambitious military officer seeking a wife who would grace a high position than he was a man in love with a woman. Separating

these two elements within himself, he was able to value her qualities, not as adornments to some Home or Colonial Headquarters House, but as of supreme worth for their own sake. "People have only got to see her," he said inwardly, to which he added aloud:

"I dare say the cloud may not be so threatening, after all; and even if it is, I should go under it with the pluckiest woman in the world."

She acknowledged this with a scarcely visible smile and a slight inclination of the head. "Thank you; I'm foolish enough to like to hear you say it. I think I *am* plucky—alone. But I shouldn't be if I involved anybody else."

"But if it was some one who could help you?"

"That might be different, but I don't know of any one who could. *You* couldn't. If you tried you'd only injure yourself without doing me any good."

"At the least, I could take you away from—from all this."

"No, because it's the sort of thing one can never leave behind. It's gone ahead of us. It will meet us at every turn. You and I—and papa—are probably by to-day a subject for gossip in half the clubs in New York. To-morrow it will be the same thing in London—at the club you call the Rag—and the Naval and Military—and your different Service clubs——"

To hide the renewal of his dismay he pooh-poohed this possibility. "As a mere nine days' wonder."

"Which isn't forgotten when the nine days are past. Long after they've ceased speaking of it they'll remember——"

"They'll remember," he interrupted fiercely, "that I jilted you."

She coloured hotly. "That you—what?"

He coloured, too. The words were as much a surprise to him as to her. He had never thought of this view of the case till she herself summoned up the vision of his friends and enemies discussing the affair in big

leather arm-chairs in big, ponderous rooms in Piccadilly or St. James's Square. It was what they would say, of course. It was what he himself would have said of any one else. He had a renewed feeling that retreat was cut off.

"If we're not married—if I go home without you—it's what'll be on everybody's lips."

"But it won't be true," she said, with a little gasp.

He laughed. "That won't matter. It's how it'll look."

"Oh, looks!"

"It's what we're talking about, isn't it? It's what makes the difference. I shall figure as a cad."

He spoke as one who makes an astounding discovery. She was inexpressibly shocked.

"Oh, but you couldn't," was all she could find to say, but she said it with conviction.

He laughed again. "You'll see. There's no one—not my best friends—not my mother—nor my sisters—who won't believe—whatever you and I may say to the contrary—who won't believe but that I—threw you over."

A toss of his hand, a snap of his fingers, suited the action to the word.

Her colour came and went in little shifting flashes. She moved a pace or two aimlessly, restively. Her head went high, her chin tilted. When she spoke her voice trembled with indignation, but she only said:

"They couldn't believe it long."

"Oh, couldn't they! The story would follow me to my grave. Things like that are never forgotten among fellows so intimate as soldiers. There was a chap in our regiment who jilted a nice girl at the Cape—sailed for home secretly only a week before the wedding." He paused to let her take in the dastardly nature of the flight. "Well, he rejoined at the depot. He stayed—but he didn't stay long. The Rifles got too hot for him—or too cold. The last I ever heard of him he was giving English lessons at Boulogne."

The flagrancy of the case gave her an advantage. "It's idle to think that that kind of fate could overtake you."

"The fate that can overtake me easily enough is that as long as I live they'll say I chucked a girl because she'd had bad luck."

She was about to reply when the click of the latch of the gate diverted her attention. Drusilla Fane, attended by Davenant, was coming up the hill. Seeing Olivia and Ashley at the end of the lawn, Drusilla deflected her course across the grass, Davenant in her wake. Her wide, frank smile was visible from a long way off.

"This is not an indiscretion," she laughed, as she advanced; "neither is it vulgar curiosity to see the lion. I shouldn't have come at all if mother hadn't sent me with a message."

Wearing a large hat *à la* Princesse de Lamballe and carrying a long-handled sunshade which she held daintily, like a Watteau shepherdess holding a crook, Drusilla had an air of refined eighteenth-century dash. Knowing the probability that she disturbed some poignant bit of conversation, she proceeded to take command, stepping up to Olivia with a hasty kiss. "Hello, you dear thing!" Turning to Ashley, she surveyed him an instant before offering her hand. "So you've got here! How fit you look! What sort of trip did you have, and how did you leave your people? And, oh, by the way, this is Mr. Davenant."

Davenant, who had been paying his respects to Miss Guion, charged forward, with hand outstretched and hearty: "Happy to meet you, Colonel. Glad to welcome you to our country."

"Oh!"

Ashley snapped out the monosyllable in a dry, metallic voice pitched higher than his usual key. The English softening of the vowel sound, so droll to the American ear, was also more pronounced than was customary in his speech, so that the exclamation became a sharp "A-ow!"

Feeling his greeting to have been insufficient, Davenant continued, pumping up a forced rough-and-ready cordiality: "Heard so much about you, Colonel, that you seem like an old friend. Hope you'll like us. Hope you'll enjoy your stay."

"Oh, indeed? I don't know, I'm sure."

Ashley's glance shifted from Drusilla to Olivia as though asking in some alarm who was this exuberant bumpkin in his Sunday clothes who had dropped from nowhere. Davenant drew back; his face fell. He looked like a big, sensitive dog hurt by a rebuff. It was Mrs. Fane who came to the rescue.

"Peter's come to see Cousin Henry. They've got business to talk over. And mother wants to know if you and Colonel Ashley won't come to dinner to-morrow evening. That's my errand. Just ourselves, you know. It'll be very quiet."

Olivia recovered somewhat from the agitation of the previous half-hour as well as from the movement of sudden, inexplicable anger which Ashley's reception of Davenant had produced in her. Even so she could speak but coldly, and, as it were, from a long way off.

"You'll go," she said, turning to Ashley, "and I'll come if I can leave papa. I'll run up now and see how he is and take Mr. Davenant with me."

XIV

THERE was dignity in the way in which Davenant both withdrew and stood his ground. He was near the Corinthian portico of the house as Olivia approached him. Leaning on his stick, he looked lowering back at Ashley, who talked to Drusilla without noticing him further. Olivia guessed that in Davenant's heart there was envy tinged with resentment, antipathy not tempered by a certain unwilling admira-

tion. She wondered what it was that made the difference between the two men, that gave Ashley his very patent air of superiority. It was a superiority not in looks, since Davenant was the taller and the handsomer; nor in clothes, since Davenant was the better dressed; nor in the moral make-up, since Davenant had given proofs of unlimited generosity. But there it was, a tradition of self-assurance, a habit of command which in any company that knew nothing about either would have made the Englishman easily stand first.

Her flash of anger against the one in defence of the other passed away, its place being taken by a feeling that astonished her quite as much. She tried to think it no more than a pang of jealousy at seeing her own countryman snubbed by a foreigner. She was familiar with the sensation from her European, and especially her English, experiences. At an unfriendly criticism it could be roused on behalf of a chance stranger from Colorado or California, and was generally quite impersonal. She told herself that it was impersonal now, that she would have had the same impulse of protection, of championship, for anyone.

Nevertheless there was a tone in her voice as she joined him that struck a new note in their acquaintanceship.

"I'm glad you came when you did. I wanted you to meet Colonel Ashley. You'll like him when you know him better. Just at first he was a little embarrassed. We'd been talking of things——"

"I didn't notice anything—that is, anything different from any other Englishman."

"Yes; that's it, isn't it? Meeting an Englishman is often like the first plunge into a cold bath—chilling at first, but delightful afterward."

He stopped under the portico, to say with a laugh that was not quite spontaneous: "Yes; I dare say. But my experience is limited. I've never got to the—afterward."

"Oh, well, you will," she said encouragingly, "now that you know Colonel Ashley."

"I've heard of men plunging into a cold bath and finding it so icy that they've popped out again."

"Yes; thin-blooded men, who are sensitive to chills. Not men like you."

They entered the house, lingering in the oval sitting-room through which they had to pass.

"Fortunately," he tried to say lightly, "it doesn't matter in this case whether I'm sensitive to chills or not."

"Oh, but it does. I want you two to be friends."

"What for?" The question was so point-blank as to be a little scornful, but she ignored that.

"On Colonel Ashley's side, for what he'll gain in knowing you; on yours—for something more."

He stopped again, at the foot of the staircase in the hall. "May I ask—just what you mean by that?"

She hesitated. "It's something that a tactful person wouldn't tell. If I do, it's only because I want you to consider me as—your friend. I know you haven't hitherto," she hurried on, as he flushed and tried to speak. "I haven't deserved it. But after what's happened—and after all you've done for us——"

"I could consider you my friend without asking Colonel Ashley to think of me as his."

"Hardly—if I marry him; and besides—when you know him—— You see," she began again, "what I have in mind depends upon your knowing him—rather well."

"Then, Miss Guion," he laughed, "you can drop it. I've sized him up with a look. I've seen others like him—at Gibraltar and Malta and Aden and Hong-Kong and Cairo, and wherever their old flag floats. They're a fine lot. He's all right for you—all right in his place. Only, the place isn't—mine."

"Still," she persisted, "if I marry him you'd be sometimes in England; and you'd come to visit us, wouldn't you?"

"Come and—what?" His astonishment made him speak slowly.

She took a step or two up the stairway, leaning on the banister in a way to prevent his advancing. She was now looking down at him, instead of looking up.

"Isn't it true?" she said with hesitation—"at least I've rather guessed it—and I've gathered it from things Drusilla has said about you. You see," she began once more, "if we're to be friends you mustn't mind speaking frankly and saying things that other people couldn't say. You've intervened so much in my life that I feel you've given me a right to—intervene—in yours."

"Oh, intervene as much as you like, Miss Guion," he said honestly.

"Well, then, isn't it true that there are things you've wanted—wanted very much—and never had? If so—and I marry Colonel Ashley——"

"Hold on! Let's see what you mean by—things. If it's visiting round in high society——"

He tried to render as scorn his dismay at this touching on his weakness.

"I don't mean anything so crude. Visiting round in high society, as you call it, would at best be only the outward and visible sign of an inward—and, perhaps, spiritual—experience of the world. Isn't that what you've wanted? You see, if I do marry Colonel Ashley, I could—don't be offended!—I could open a door to you that you've never been able to force for yourself."

"You mean get me into society?"

"You needn't be so disdainful. I didn't mean that—exactly. But there are people in the world different from those you meet in business—and in their way more interesting—certainly more picturesque. They'd like you if they knew you—and I had an idea that you—rather craved—— After all, it's nothing to be ashamed of. It's only making the world bigger for oneself, and——"

Backing away from the stairway, he stood on a rug

in the middle of the hall, his head hung like a young bull about to charge.

"What made you think of it?"

"Isn't that obvious? After you've done so much for me——"

"I haven't done anything for you, Miss Guion. I've said so a good many times. It wouldn't be right for me to take payment for what you don't owe me. Besides, there's nothing I want."

"That is to say," she returned coldly, "you prefer the rôle of benefactor. You refuse to accept the little I might be able to do. I admit that it isn't much—but it's *something*—something within my power, and which I thought you might like. But since you don't——"

"It's no question of liking; it's one of admitting a principle. If you offer me a penny it's in part payment for a pound, while I say, and say again, that you don't owe me anything. If there's a debt at all it's your father's—and it's not transferable."

"Whether it's transferable or not is a matter that rests between my father and me—and, of course, Colonel Ashley, if I marry him."

He looked at her with sudden curiosity. "Why do you always say that with—an 'if'?"

She reflected an instant. "Because," she said slowly, "I can't say it in any other way."

He straightened himself; he advanced again to the foot of the stairway.

"Is that because of any reason of—*his?*"

"It's because of a number of reasons, one of which is mine. It's this—that I find it difficult to go away with one man—when I have to turn my back upon the overwhelming debt I owe another. I do owe it—I *do*. The more I try to ignore it, the more it comes in between me and——"

He pressed forward, raising himself on the first step of the stairs, till his face was on a level with hers. He grew red and stammered:

"But, Miss Guion, you're—you're—in love with him?—the man you'd be going away with?"

She nodded. "Yes; but that wouldn't help me to feel justified with regard to the—the duty—I was leaving behind."

He dropped again to the level of the hall. "I don't understand. Do you mean to say that what I've done for Mr. Guion would keep you from getting married?"

"I'm not prepared to say that. Colonel Ashley is so—so splendid in the way he takes everything that——But I'll say this much," she began again, "that you've made it *hard* for me to be married."

"How so? I thought it would be all the other way."

"If you'll put yourself in my place—or in Colonel Ashley's place—you'll see. Try to think what it means for two people like us to go away—and be happy—and live in a great, fashionable world—and be people of some importance—knowing that some one else—who was nothing to us, as we were nothing to him—had to deprive himself of practically everything he had in the world to enable us to do it."

"But if it was a satisfaction to him——"

"That wouldn't make any difference to us. The facts would be the same.

"Then, as far as I see, I've done more harm than good."

"You've helped papa."

"But I haven't helped you."

"As I understand it, you didn't want to."

"I didn't want to—to do the reverse."

"Perhaps it wouldn't be the reverse if you could condescend to let me do something for you. It would be the fair exchange which is no robbery. That's why I suggest that if I'm to have that—that life over there—you should profit by its advantages."

He shook his head violently. "No, Miss Guion. Please don't think of it. It's out of the question. I wish you'd let me say once for all that you owe me

nothing. I shall never accept anything from you—never!"

"Oh!" It was the protest of one who has been hurt.

"I'll take that back," he said instantly. "There *is* something you can do for me and that I should like. Marry your Englishman, Miss Guion, and do what you said just now—go away and be happy. If you want to give me a reward, I'll take that."

She surveyed him a minute in astonishment. "You're perfectly extraordinary," she said at last, in a tone of exasperation, "and"—she threw at him a second later—"and impossible!"

Before he could reply she went grandly up the stairway, so that he was obliged to follow her. In the hall above she turned on him again. Had he not known that he had given her no cause for offence he would have said that her eyes filled with tears.

"Things are very hard as it is," she said reproachfully. "You needn't go out of your way to make them gratuitously cruel."

"But, Miss Guion——" he began to protest.

"Please go in," she commanded, throwing open, as she spoke, the door of her father's room.

XV

MEANWHILE, down on the lawn, Drusilla and Ashley were talking things over from their own points of view. There had been a second of embarrassment when they were first left alone, which Drusilla got over by pointing with her parasol to an indistinguishable spot in the stretch of tree-tops, spires, and gables sloping from the gate, saying—

"That's our house—the one with the little white cupola."

He made no pretence to listen or to look. "She says she doesn't want to marry me."

He made the statement dispassionately, as though laying down a subject for academic discussion.

It was some little time before she could think what to say.

"Well, that doesn't surprise me," she risked at last.

"Doesn't surprise you?"

She shook her head. "On the contrary, I should be very much astonished if she did—now. I should be astonished at any woman in her position wanting to marry a man in yours."

"I don't care a hang for my position."

"Oh yes, you do. And even if you didn't, it wouldn't matter. It's naturally a case in which you and she have to see from different angles. With you it's a point of honour to stand by her; with her it's the same thing not to let you."

"In honour it's the positive, not the negative, that takes precedence, and the positive happens to be mine."

"I don't think you can argue that way, you know. What takes precedence of everything else is—common sense."

"And do you mean to say that common sense requires that she shall give me up?"

"I shouldn't go so far as to assert that. But I shouldn't mind saying that if she did give you up there'd be a lot of common sense in her doing it."

"On whose account. Mine?"

"Yes; and hers. Perhaps chiefly on hers. You can hardly realise the number of things she has to take care of—and you'd be one more."

"I confess I don't seize your drift."

"It's not very abstruse, however. Just think. It isn't as if Cousin Henry had fallen ill, or had died, or had gone to pieces in any of the ordinary ways. Except for his own discomfort, he might just as well have been tried and sentenced and sent to prison. He's been as good as there. Every one knows it's only a special providence that he didn't go. But if he's escaped

that by the skin of his teeth, he hasn't escaped a lot of other things. He hasn't escaped being without a penny in the world. He hasn't escaped having his house sold over his head and being turned out into the streets. He hasn't escaped reaching a perfectly impotent old age, with not a soul on this earth to turn to but Olivia."

"What about me?"

"Would *you* take him?"

"I shouldn't *take* him exactly. If he was my father-in-law"—he made a little grimace—"I suppose I could pension him off somewhere, or board him out, like an old horse. One couldn't have him round."

"H'm! I dare say that would do—but I doubt it. If you'd ever been a daughter you might feel that you couldn't dispose of a poor, old, broken-down father quite so easily. After all, he's not a horse. You might more or less forsake him when all was going well, and yet want to stick to him through thick and thin if he came a cropper. Look at me! I go off and leave my poor old dad for a year and more at a time—because he's a saint; but if he wasn't—especially if he'd got into any such scrape as Cousin Henry's—which isn't thinkable—but if he did—I'd never leave him again. That's my temperament. It's every girl's temperament. It's Olivia's. But all that is neither here nor there. If she married you, her whole life would be given up to trying to make you blend with a set of circumstances you couldn't possibly blend with. It would be worse than singing one tune to an orchestra playing another. She'd go mad with the attempt."

"Possibly; except for one factor which you've overlooked."

"Oh, love! Yes, yes. I thought you'd say that." Drusilla tossed her hands impatiently. "Love will do a lot, but it won't do everything. You can't count on it to work miracles in a sophisticated company like the Sussex Rifles. They've passed the age of faith for that sort of thing."

"I don't see," he said, speaking very slowly, "that the Rifles need be altogether taken into consideration."

She looked at him fixedly. "Do you mean that you'd—send in your papers?"

"Only in the sense that if my wife wasn't happy in the Service we could get out of it."

"Then you're really so much in love that you'd be willing to throw up everything on account of it!" There was some incredulity in her tone, to which, however, he offered no objection.

"Willing or unwilling isn't to the point. Surely you see that as far as public opinion goes I'm dished either way. The more I think of it the plainer it becomes. If I marry Olivia I let myself in for connexion with a low-down scandal; if I don't, then they'll say I left her in the lurch. As for the effect on any possible promotion there might be in store for me, it would be six of one and half a dozen of the other. If I married her, and there was something good to be had, and old Bannockburn, let us say, was at the Horse Guards, then Lady Ban wouldn't have Olivia; and if I didn't marry her, and there was the same situation with old Englemere in command, then he wouldn't have me. There it is in a nutshell—simply nothing to choose."

They proceeded to stroll aimlessly up and down the lawn.

"I can quite see how it looks from your point of view——" she began.

"No, you can't," he interrupted sharply, "because you leave out the fact that I *am*—I don't mind saying it—that is, to you—you've been such a good pal to me!—I shall never forget it!—but I *am*—head over heels—desperately—in love."

Having already heard this confession in what now seemed the far-off days in Southsea, she could hear it again with no more than a sense of oppression about the heart.

"Yes," she smiled bravely. "I know you are. And

between two ills you choose the one that has some compensation attached to it."

"Between two ills," he corrected, "I'm choosing the only course open to a man of honour. Isn't that it?"

There was a wistful inflection on the query. It put forth at one and the same time a request for corroboration and a challenge to a contrary opinion. If there could be no contrary opinion, he would have been glad of some sign of approval or applause. He wanted to be modest; and yet it was a stimulus to doing precisely the right thing to get a little praise for it, especially from a woman like Drusilla.

In this for once she disappointed him. "Of course you are," she assented, even too promptly.

"And yet you're advising me," he said, returning to the charge, "to make a bolt for it—and leave Olivia to shift for herself."

"If I remember rightly, the question you raised was not about you, but about her. It wasn't as to whether you should marry her, but as to whether she should marry you. I'm not disputing your point of view; I'm only defending Olivia's. I can see three good reasons why you should keep your word to her——"

"Indeed? And what are they?"

She told them off on her fingers. "First, as a gentleman, you can't do anything else. Second——"

"Your first reason," he interrupted hastily, as though he feared she suspected him of not being convinced of it, "covers the whole ground. We don't need the rest."

"Still," she insisted, "we might as well have them. Second, it's the more prudent of two rather disadvantageous courses. Third—to quote your own words—you're head over heels in love with her. It's easy to see that now one, now another of these reasons is uppermost in your mind; but it's also easy to see that none of them makes a conclusive appeal to Olivia Guion. That's the point."

"The point is that I'm in love with her, and—if it's

not claiming too much—she with me. We've nothing else to consider."

"You haven't. She has. She has all the things I've just hinted at—and ever so many more; besides which," she added, taking a detached, casual tone, "I suppose she has to make up her mind one way or another as to what she's going to do about Peter Davenant."

The crow's-foot wrinkles about his eyes deepened to a frown of inquiry. "About Peter—who?"

Drusilla still affected a casual tone. "Oh? Hasn't she told you about *him?*"

"Not a word. Who is he?"

She nodded in the direction of the house. "He's upstairs with Cousin Henry."

"The big fellow who was here just now? That—lumpkin?"

"Yes," she said dryly, "that—lumpkin. It was he who gave Cousin Henry the money to meet his liabilities."

"So he's the Fairy Prince? He certainly doesn't look it."

"No; he doesn't look it; but he's as much of a problem to Olivia as if he did."

"Why? What has he to do with her?"

"Nothing, except that I suppose she must feel very grateful."

They reached the edge of the lawn, where a hedge of dahlias separated them from the neighbouring garden.

"When you say that," he asked, "do you mean anything in particular?"

"I suppose I mean everything in particular. The situation is one in which all the details count."

"And the bearing of this special detail——"

"Oh, don't try to make me explain that. In the first place, I don't know; and in the second, I shouldn't tell you if I did. I'm merely giving you the facts. I think you're entitled to know *them.*"

"So I should have said. Are there many more?

I've had a lot since I landed. I thought I must have heard pretty well all there was——"

"Probably you had, except just that. I imagine Olivia found it difficult to speak of, and so I'm doing it for her."

"Why should she find it difficult to speak of? It's a mere matter of business, I suppose."

"If it's business to give Cousin Henry what would be nearly a hundred thousand pounds in English money, with no prospect that any one can see of his ever getting it back—that is, not unless old Madame de Melcourt——"

"Oh, I say! Then he's one of your beastly millionaires, by Jove!—grind the noses off the poor, and that sort of thing, to play Haroun al-Raschid with the cash."

"Not in the least. He never ground the nose off any one; and as for being a millionaire, father says that what he's done for Cousin Henry will pretty well clean him out."

"All the same, he's probably done it with a jolly sharp eye to the main chance."

"Oh, I dare say his motives weren't altogether altruistic. Only it's a little difficult to see where the main chance comes in."

"Then what the deuce is he up to?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that. I repeat that I'm only giving you the facts. You must interpret them for yourself."

He looked thoughtful. Drusilla plucked a scarlet dahlia and fastened it in her dress, after which they strolled slowly back to the middle of the lawn. Here Ashley said:

"Has all this got anything to do with Olivia? I wish you wouldn't make mysteries."

"I'm not making mysteries. I'm telling you what's happened just as it occurred. He advanced the money to Cousin Henry, and that's all I know about it. If I draw any inferences——"

"Well?"

"I'm just as likely to be wrong as right."

"Then you *have* drawn inferences?"

"Who wouldn't? I should think you'd be drawing them yourself."

They wandered on a few yards, when he stopped again. "Look here," he said, with a sort of appealing roughness, "you're quite straight with me, aren't you?"

The rich, surging colour came swiftly into her face, as wine seen through something dark and transparent. Her black eyes shone like jet. She would have looked tragic had it not been for her fixed, steady smile.

"Have I ever been anything else with you?"

"No. You've been straight as a die. I'll say that for you. You've been a good pal—a devilish good pal! But over here—in America—everything seems to go by enigmas—and puzzles—and surprises——"

"I'll explain what I can to you," she said, with a heightened colour, "but it won't be so very easy. There are lots of people who, feeling as I do—toward Olivia—and—and toward you—would want to beat about the bush. But when all these things began to happen—and you were already on the way—I turned everything over in my mind and decided to speak exactly as I think."

"Good!"

"But it isn't so very easy," she repeated, pretending to rearrange the dahlia in her laces, so as to find a pretext for not looking him in the eyes. "It isn't so very easy; and if—later on—in after-years perhaps—when everything is long over—it ever strikes you that I didn't play fair—it'll be because I played *so* fair that I laid myself open to that imputation. One can, you know. I only ask you to remember it. That's all."

Ashley was bewildered. He could follow little more than half of what she said. "More mysteries," he was sighing to himself as she spoke. "And such a colour! That's her strong point. Pity it only comes by fits and flashes. But, good Lord, what a country! Always something queer and new."

"Good-bye," she said, offering her hand before he had time to emerge from his meditations. "We shall see you to-morrow evening. And, by the way, we dine at half-past seven. We're country people here, and primitive. No; don't come to the gate. Olivia must be wondering where you are."

He looked after her as she tripped over the lawn towards the roadway, still holding her long-handled, beribboned, eighteenth-century sunshade with the daintiness of a Watteau shepherdess holding a crook.

"She's a good 'un," he said to himself. "Straight as a die, she is—and true as steel."

None the less he was glad when she left him.

XVI

ASHLEY wanted to be alone. He needed solitude in order to face the stupendous bit of information Mrs. Fane had given him. Everything else he had heard during the past twenty-four hours he had felt himself more or less competent to meet. True, his meeting it would be at a sacrifice and the probable loss of some of the best things he had hoped and worked for; but he should have the satisfaction that comes to every man of honour when he has done a brave thing well. There would be something, too, in giving the lie to people who accused him of having no thought but for his own advancement. He had been sensitive to that charge, because of the strain of truth in it, and yet had seen no means of counteracting it. Very well; he should counteract it now.

Since there was no way out of the situation he had found in America—that is, no way consistent with self-respect—it was characteristic of him, both as diplomatist and master of tactics, to review what was still in his favour. He called himself to witness that

he had wasted no time in repining. He had risen to the circumstances as fast as nature would permit, and adapted himself right on the spur of the moment to an entirely new outlook on the future. Moreover, he had been able to detach Olivia herself from the degrading facts surrounding her, seeing her, as he had seen her from the first, holy and stainless, untouched by conditions through which few women could pass without some personal deterioration. In his admiration and loyalty he had not wavered for a second. On the contrary, he was sure that he should love her the more intensely, in spite of, and perhaps because of, her misfortunes.

He felt free, therefore, to resent this new revelation so fantastically out of proportion to the harmony of life. It was the most staggering thing he had ever heard of. An act such as that with which Drusilla credited Davenant brought into daily existence a feature too prodigious to find room there. Or, rather, having found the room through sheer force of its own bulk, it dwarfed everything else into insignificance. It hid all objects and blocked all ways. You could get neither round it nor over it nor through it. You could not even turn back and ignore it. You could only stand and stare at it helplessly, giving it the full tribute of awe.

Ashley gave it. He gave it while lighting mechanically a cigar which he did not smoke and standing motionless in the middle of the lawn, heedless of the glances—furtive, discreet, sympathetic, admiring—cast at him from the windows and balconies of the surrounding houses. His quick eye, trained to notice everything within its ken, saw them plainly enough. The houses were not so distant nor the foliage so dense but that kindly, neighbourly interest could follow the whole drama taking place at Tory Hill. Ashley could guess with tolerable accuracy that the ladies whom he saw ostensibly reading or sewing on verandas had been invited to the wedding, and were consequently now in

the position of spectators at a play. The mere detail of this American way of living, with unwalled properties merging into one another, and doors and windows flung wide to every passing glance, gave him an odd sense of conducting his affairs in the market-place or on the stage. If he did not object to it, it was because of the incitement to keep up to the level of his best which he always drew from the knowledge that other people's eyes were upon him.

He felt this stimulus when Olivia came out to the Corinthian portico, seating herself in a wicker chair, with an obvious invitation to him to join her.

"Drusilla Fane has been telling me about your—your friend."

She knew he meant the last two words to be provocative. She knew it by slight signs of nervousness in his way of standing before her, one foot on the grass and the other on the first step of the portico. He betrayed himself, too, in an unsuccessful attempt to make his intonation casual, as well as by puffing at his cigar without noticing that it had gone out. An instant's reflection decided her to accept his challenge. As the subject had to be met, the sooner it came up the better.

She looked at him mildly. "What did she say about him?"

"Only that he was the man who put up the money."

"Yes; he was."

"Why didn't you tell me that this morning?"

"I suppose because there was so much else to say. We should have come round to it in time. I did tell you everything but his name."

"And the circumstances."

"How do you mean—the circumstances?"

"I got the impression from you this morning that it was some millionaire Johnny who'd come to your father's aid by advancing the sum in the ordinary way of business. I didn't understand that it was a com-

paratively poor chap who was cleaning himself out to come to yours."

In wording his phrase he purposely went beyond the warrant in order to rouse her to denial, or perhaps to indignation. But she said only:

"Did Drusilla say it was to come to my aid?"

"She didn't say it—exactly. I gathered that it was what she thought."

She astonished him by saying simply: "I think so, too."

"Extraordinary! Do you mean to say he dropped out of a clear sky?"

"I must answer that by both a yes and a no. He did drop out of a clear sky just lately; but I'd known him before."

"Ah!" His tone was that of a cross-examiner dragging the truth from an unwilling witness. He put his questions rapidly and sharply, as though at a court martial. "So you'd known him before! Did you know him *well?*"

"*I* didn't think it was well; but apparently he did, because he asked me to marry him."

Ashley bounded. "Who? That—that cowboy!"

"Yes; if he *is* a cowboy."

"And you took money from him?"

Her elbows rested on the arm of her chair, the tip of her chin on the back of her bent fingers. Without taking her eyes from his she inclined her head slowly in assent.

"That is," he hastened to say, in some compunction, "your father took it. We must keep the distinction——"

"No; I took it. Papa was all ready to decline it. He had made up his mind——"

"Do you mean that the decision to accept it rested with you?"

"Practically."

"You didn't——" He hesitated, stammered, and grew red. "You didn't——" he began again. "You'll have to excuse the question. . . I simply *must* know, by Jove! . . . You didn't *ask* him for it?"

She rose with dignity. "If you'll come in I'll tell you about it. We can't talk out here."

He came up the portico steps to the level on which she was standing. "Tell me that first," he begged. "You *didn't* ask him for it? Did you?"

In the French window, as she was about to enter the room, she half turned round. "I don't think it would bear that construction; but it might. I'd rather you judged for yourself. I declined it at first—and then I said I'd take it. I don't know whether you'd call that asking. But please come in."

He followed her into the oval room, where they were screened from neighbourly observation, while, with the French window open, they had the advantage of the air and the rich, westering sunshine. Birds hopped about in the trees, and now and then a grey squirrel darted across the grass.

"I should think," he said nervously, before she had time to begin her explanation, "that a fellow who had done that for you would occupy your mind to the exclusion of everybody else."

Guessing that he hoped for a disclaimer on her part, she was sorry to be unable to make it.

"Not to their exclusion—but perhaps—a little to their subordination."

He pretended to laugh. "What a pretty distinction!"

"You see, I haven't been able to help it. He's loomed up so tremendously above everything——"

"And every one."

"Yes," she admitted, with apologetic frankness, "and every one—that is, in the past few days—that it's as if I couldn't see anything but him."

"Oh, I'm not jealous," he exclaimed, pacing up and down the length of the room.

"Of course not," she agreed, seating herself in one of the straight-backed chairs. Her clasped hands rested on the small round table in the centre of the room,

while she looked out across the lawn to the dahlias and zinnias on its farther edge.

Ashley, who had flung his panama on a sofa, continued to pace up and down the room, his head bent and his fingers clasped tightly under his jacket behind his back. He moved jerkily, like a man preserving outward self-control in spite of extreme nervous tension.

He listened almost without interruption while she gave him a precise account of Davenant's intervention in her father's troubles. She spared no detail of her own opposition and eventual capitulation. She spoke simply and easily, as though repeating something learned by heart, just as she had narrated the story of Guion's defaulting in the morning. Apart from the fact that she toyed with a paper-knife lying on the table, she sat rigidly still, her eyes never wandering from the line of autumn flowers on the far side of the lawn.

"So you see," she concluded, in her quiet voice, "I came to understand that it was a choice between taking it from him and taking it from the poor women papa had ruined; and I thought that as he was young—and strong—and a man—he'd be better able to bear it. That was the reason."

He came to a standstill on the other side of the table, where he could see her in profile.

"You're extraordinary, by Jove!" he muttered, "You're not a bit like what you look. You look so fragile and tender; and yet you could have let that old man——"

"I could only have done it if it was right. Nothing that's right is very hard, you know."

"And what about the suffering?"

She half smiled, faintly shrugging her shoulders. "Don't you think we make more of suffering than there's any need for? Suffering is nothing much—except, I suppose, the suffering that comes from want. That's tragic. But physical pain—and the things we call trials

—are nothing so terrible if you know the right way to bear them."

The abstract question didn't interest him. He resumed his restless pacing.

"So," he began again, in his tone of conducting a court martial—"so you refused the money in the first place, because you thought the fellow was trying to get you into his power. Have you had any reason to change your opinion since?"

"None, except that he makes no effort to do it."

He stopped again beside the table. "And do you suppose he would? When you've prepared your ambush cleverly enough you don't have to go out and drag your victim into it. You've only to lie still and he'll walk in of his own accord."

"Of course I see that."

"Well, what then?"

She threw him a glance over her shoulder. To do so it was necessary for her to turn her head both sidewise and upward, so that he got the exquisite lines of the neck and profile, the mysterious grey-green tint of the eyes, and the coppery gleam of her hair.

The appeal to his senses and to something beyond his senses made him gasp. It made him tremble. "My God, what a wife for *me!*" he was saying to himself. "She's got the pluck of a Jeanne d'Arc and the nerve of a Christian martyr."

"Well, then," she said, in answer to his words—"then I don't have to walk into the ambush—unless I want to."

"Does that mean that there are conceivable conditions in which you might want to?"

She turned completely round in her chair. Both hands, with fingers interlaced, rested on the table as she looked up at him.

"I shall have to let you find your own reply to that."

"But you know he's in love with you."

"I know he was in love with me once. I've no absolute reason to think that he is so still."

"But supposing he was? Would it make any difference to you?"

"Would it make any difference to *you*?"

"It would make the difference——"

He stopped in confusion. While he was not clear as to what he was going to say, he was startled by the possibilities before him. The one thing plain was that her question, simple as it seemed, gave an entirely new turn to the conversation. It called on him to take the lead, and put him, neatly and skilfully, in the one place of all others which—had he descried it in advance—he would have been eager to avoid. Would it make any difference to him? What difference *could* it make? What difference *must* it make?

It was one of those moments which occur from time to time when a man of honour must speak first and reflect afterwards—just as at the heights of Dargai he had had to risk his life for Private Vickerson's, without debating as to which of them, in the general economy of lives, could the more easily be spared.

"It would make the difference——"

He stopped again. It was a great deal to say. Once he had said it there could be no reconsideration. Reconsideration would be worse than not saying it at all, on the principle that not to stand by one's guns might be a greater cowardice than not to mount them. Fear, destruction, and the pit might come upon him; the service, the country, Heneage, home, honours, ambitions, promotions, high posts of command, all might be swept into the abyss, and yet one imperative duty would survive the wreck—the duty to be Rupert Ashley at his finest. The eyes of England were on him. There was always that conviction, that incentive. Let his heroism be never so secret, sooner or later those eyes would find him out.

He was silent so long that she asked, not impatiently, "It would make what difference, Rupert?"

It was clear that she had no idea as to what was passing in his mind. There had been an instant—just an instant—no more—when he had almost doubted her, when her strategy in putting him where he was had seemed too deft to be the result of chance. But, with her pure face turned upward and her honest eyes on his, that suspicion couldn't last.

"It would make the difference——"

If he paused again, it was only because his throat swelled with a choking sensation that made it difficult to speak; he felt, too, that his face was congested. Nevertheless the space, which was not longer than a few seconds by the clock, gave him time to remember that as his mother's and his sister's incomes were inalienable he was by so much the more free. He was by so much the more free to do the mad, romantic, quixotic thing, which might seem to be a contradiction of his past, but was not so much a contradiction of *himself* as people who knew him imperfectly might suppose. He was taken to be ambitious, calculating, shrewd; when all the while he knew himself to be—as most Englishmen are at heart—quixotic, romantic, and even a little mad, when madness can be sublime.

He was able at last to get his sentence out.

"It would make the difference that . . . before we are married . . . or after . . . probably after . . . I should have to square him."

"Square him?" She echoed the words as though she had no idea what they meant.

"I'm worth . . . I *must* be worth . . . a hundred thousand pounds . . . perhaps more."

"Oh, you mean square him in that way."

"I must be a man of honour before everything, by Jove!"

"You couldn't be anything else. You don't need to go to extremes like that to prove it."

Her lack of emotion, of glad enthusiasm, chilled him. She even ceased to look at him, turning her profile

toward him and gazing again abstractedly across the lawn. A sudden fear took hold of him, the fear that his hesitations, his evident difficulty in getting the thing out, had enabled her to follow the processes by which he whipped himself up to an act that should have been spontaneous. He had a suspicion, too, that in this respect he had fallen short of the American—the cowboy, as he had called him. "I must do better than him," he said, in his English idiom. The thought that he might not have done as well was rather sickening. If he had so failed it was though inadvertence, but the effect on Olivia would be as great as if it was from fear. To counteract it he felt the need of being more emphatic. His emphasis took the form of simple common sense.

"It isn't going to extremes to take up one's own responsibilities. I can't let a fellow like that do things for your father any more than for mine, by Jove! It's not only doing things for my father, but for—my wife."

Drawing up a small chair, he sat down on the other side of the table. He sat down with the air of a man who means to stay and take possession.

"Oh, but I'm not your wife, Rupert."

"You're my wife already," he declared, "to all intents and purposes. We've published our intention to become man and wife to the world. Neither of us can go back on that. The mere fact that certain words haven't been mumbled over us is secondary. For everything that constitutes duty I'm your husband now."

"Oh no, you're not. You're the noblest man in the world, Rupert. I never dreamed that there could be any one like you. But I couldn't let you—I couldn't——"

He crushed her hands in both of his own, leaning towards her across the table. "Oh, my darling, if you only knew how easy it is——"

"No, it isn't easy. It can't be easy. I couldn't let you do it for me——"

"But what about *him?* You let—*him?*"

"Oh, but that's different."

"How is it different?"

"I don't know, Rupert; but it is. Or rather," she went on rapidly, "I do know, but I can't explain. If you were an American you'd understand it."

"Oh, American—be blowed!" The accent was all tenderness, the protest all beseeching.

"I can't explain it," she hurried on, because you don't understand us. It's one of the ways in which an Englishman never *can* understand us. But the truth is that money doesn't mean as much to us as it does to you. I know you think the contrary, but that's where you make your primary mistake. It's light come and light go with most of us, for the simple reason that money is outside our real life; whereas with you English it's the warp and woof of it."

"Oh, bosh, darling!"

"No, it isn't bosh. In your civilization it's as the blood; in ours it's only as the clothing. That's something like the difference. In accepting it from Peter Davenant—which is hard enough!—I take only what he can do without; whereas——"

"I can do without it, too."

"Whereas," she persisted, "if I were to let you do this I should be robbing you of the essence of what you are."

He drew back slightly. "You mean that your Yankee is a strong man, while I'm——"

"I don't mean anything invidious or unkind. But isn't it self-evident, or nearly, that we're individuals, while you're parts of an intricate social system? The minute you fall out of your place in the system you come to grief; but vicissitudes don't affect us much more than a change of coats."

"I don't care a button for my place in the system."

"But I do. I care for it *for* you. I should have married you and shared it if I could. But I'd rather not marry you than that you should lose it."

"That is," he said coldly, "you'd rather use *his* money than——"

She withdrew her hands, her brows contracting and her eyes clouding in her effort to make him understand the position from her point of view. "You see, it's this way. For one thing, we've taken the money already. That's past. We may have taken it temporarily, or for good and all, as things turn out; but in any case it's done. And yet even if it weren't done it would be easier for us to draw on him rather than on you, because he's one of ourselves."

"One of yourselves? I thought that's just what he wasn't. I thought he was a jolly outsider."

"You mean socially. But that again hasn't much significance in a country where socially we're all of one class. Where there's only one class there can't be any outsiders."

"Oh, that's all very fine. But look at you—with your extremes of rich and poor!"

"That's the most superficial difference among us. It's the easiest possible thing to transcend. I'm transcending it now in feeling that I've a right—yes, a kind of right—to take Peter Davenant's money because as Americans we've a claim on each other."

He threw himself against the straight back of the chair, his arms flung out with a gesture that brought his hands nearly to the floor. "You're the last people in the world to feel anything of the kind. Everyone knows that you're a set of ruthless, predatory——"

"I know that's the way it seems; and I'm not defending anything that may be wrong. And yet, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, we *have* a sense of brotherhood—I don't know any other name for it—among ourselves which isn't to be found anywhere else in the world. You English haven't got it. That's why the thing I am saying seems mere sentiment to you, and even mawkish. You're so afraid of sentiment. But it's true. It may be only a rudimentary sense of brother-

hood ; and it's certainly not universal, as it ought to be, because we feel it only among ourselves. We don't really include the foreigner—not at least till he becomes one of us. I'm an instance of that limitation myself, because I can't feel it toward you, and I do——"

"You do feel it toward the big chap," he said scornfully.

She made a renewed effort to explain herself. "You see, it's something like this. If my aunt de Melcourt, who's very well off, were to come forward and help us, I'd let her do it without scruple. Not that there's any particular reason why she should! But if she did—well, you can see for yourself that it wouldn't be as if she were a stranger."

"Of course! She's one of your own people—and all that."

"Well, he's one of our own people—Mr. Davenant. Not to the degree that she is—but the same sort of thing—even if more distant. It's very distant, I admit——"

His lip curled. "So distant as to be out of sight."

"No ; not for him—or for me."

He sprang to his feet. "Look here, Olivia," he cried, nervously, holding his chair by the back, "what does it all mean? What are you leading up to?"

"I'm telling you as plainly as I can."

"What you aren't telling me as plainly as you can is which of us you're in love with."

She coloured. It was one of those blushes that spread up the temples and over the brows and along the line of the hair with the splendour of a stormy dawn.

"I didn't know the question had been raised," she said, "but since apparently it has——"

It might have been contrition for a foolish speech, or fear of what she was going to say, that prompted him to interrupt her hurriedly :

"I beg your pardon. It was idiotic of me to say that. I didn't mean it. As a matter of fact, I'm jumpy. I'm not master of myself. So much has been happening——"

He came round the table, and, snatching one of her hands, he kissed it again and again. He even sank on one knee beside her, holding her close to him. With the hand that remained free she stroked his crisp, wavy, iron-grey hair as a sign of pardon.

"You're quite wrong about me," he persisted. "Even if you're right about other Englishmen—which I don't admit—you're wrong about me, by Jove! If I had to give up everything I had in the world I should have all the compensation a man could desire if I got you."

She leaned over him, pressing his head against her breast, as she whispered:

"You couldn't get me that way. You must understand—I must make it as plain to you as I can—that I couldn't go to you except as an equal. I couldn't go to any man——"

He sprang to his feet. "But you *came* to me as an equal," he cried, in tones of exasperation. "That's all over and done with. It's too late to reconsider the step we've taken—too late for me—much too late!—and equally too late for you."

"I can't admit that, Rupert. I've still the right to draw back."

"The legal right—yes; whether or not you've the moral right would depend on your sense of honour."

"Of honour?"

"Certainly. There's an honour for you as well as for me. When I'm so true to you it wouldn't be the square thing to play me false."

She rose without haste. "Do you call that a fair way of putting it—to say that I play you false because I refuse to involve you in our family disasters? I don't think anyone could blame me for that."

"What they could blame you for is this—for backing out of what is practically a marriage, and for deserting me in a way that will make it seem as if I had deserted you. Quite apart from the fact that life won't be worth

anything to me without you, it will mean ruin as a man of honour if I go home alone. Every one will say—*every one*—that I funked the thing because your father——"

She hastened to speak. "That's a very urgent reason. I admit its force——"

She paused because there was a sound of voices overhead. Footsteps came along the upper hall and began to descend the stairs. Presently Davenant could be heard saying:

"Then I shall tell Harrington that they may as well foreclose at one time as another."

"Just as well." Guion's reply came from the direction of his bedroom door. "I see nothing to be gained by waiting. The sooner it's over the sooner to sleep, what?"

"They're talking about the mortgage on the property," she explained, as Davenant continued to descend "This house is to be sold—and everything in it——"

"Which is one more reason why we should be married without delay. I say," he added in another tone, "let's have him in."

"Oh no! What for?"

Before she could object further, Ashley had slipped out into the hall. "I say! Come along in."

His attitude as he stood with his hands thrust into his jacket pockets and shoulders squared bespoke conscious superiority to the man whom he was addressing. Though Davenant was not in her line of vision, she could divine his astonishment at this easy, English unceremoniousness, as well as his resentment to the tone of command. She heard him muttering an excuse which Ashley interrupted with his offhand "Oh, come in. Miss Guion would like to see you."

She felt it her duty to go forward and second this invitation. Davenant, who was standing at the foot of the staircase, murmured something about town and business.

"It's too late for town and business at this hour," Ashley objected. "Come in."

He withdrew toward the room where Olivia was standing between the *portières* of the doorway. Davenant yielded, partly because of his ignorance of the small arts of graceful refusal, but more because of his curiosity concerning the man Olivia Guion was to marry. He had some interest, too, in observing one who was chosen where he himself had been rejected. It would afford an answer to the question, "What lack I yet?" with which he was tormented at all times. That it could not be a flattering answer was plain to him from the careless, indefinable graces of Ashley's style. It was a style that Davenant would have scorned to imitate, but which nevertheless he envied. In contrast with its unstudied ease he could feel his own social methods to be laboured and apologetic. Where he was watchful to do the right thing, what Ashley said or did became the right thing because he said or did it. With the echo of soft English vowels and clear, crisp consonants in his ears, his own pronunciations, too, were rough with his harshness transmitted from an ancestry to whom the melody of speech had been of no more practical concern than the music of the spheres.

Something of all this Olivia guessed. She guessed it with a feeling of being on his side—on the American side—which a month ago would have astonished her. She guessed, too, on Davenant's part, that feeling of irritation which the calm assumptions of the Old World are likely to create when in contact with the aggressive unpretentiousness of the New, and if need were she was ready to stand by him. All she could say, however, for the moment was:

"Won't you sit down? Perhaps I ought to ring for tea."

She made the latter remark from habit. It was what she was accustomed to think of when on an autumn day the sun went behind the distant rim of Brookline hills and dusk began to gather in the oval room, as it was gathering now. If she did not ring, it was because of

her sense of the irony of offering hospitality in a house where not even a cup of tea was paid for.

She seated herself beside the round table in the chair she had occupied a half-hour earlier, facing inward to the room instead of outward to the portico. Ashley backed to the curving wall of the room, while Davenant scarcely advanced beyond the doorway. In his slow, careful approach the latter reminded her somewhat of a big St. Bernard dog responding to the summons of a leopard.

"Been up to see——?" Ashley nodded in the direction of what he took to be Guion's room.

Davenant too, nodded, but said nothing.

"How did you find papa to-day?"

"Pretty fair, Miss Guion; only, perhaps, a little more down on his luck than usual."

"The excitement kept him up at first. Now that that's over——"

Ashley interrupted her, addressing himself to Davenant. "I understand that it's to you we owe Mr. Guion's relief from the most pressing part of his cares."

Davenant's face clouded. It was the thing he was afraid of—Ashley's intrusion into the little domain of helpfulness which for a few days he had made his own. He answered warily:

"My business with Mr. Guion, Colonel, has been private. I hope you won't mind if we leave it so."

Ashley's manner took on the diplomatic persuasiveness he used towards restive barbaric potentates.

"Not a bit, my dear fellow. Of course it's private—only not as regards Miss Guion and me. You simply *must* allow us to say how grateful we are for your help, even though it need be no more than temporary."

The word produced its effect. Davenant looked from Ashley to Olivia while he echoed it. "Temporary?"

Ashley nodded again. "You have no objection, I presume, to that?"

"If Mr. Guion is ever in a position to pay me back,"

Davenant said slowly, in some bewilderment, "of course I'll take it."

"Quite so; and I think I may say that with a little time—let us say a year—we shall be able to meet——"

"It's a good bit of money," Davenant warned him.

"I know that; but if you'll give us a little leeway—as I know you will——"

"He means," Olivia spoke up, "that he'll sell his property—and whatever else he has—and pay you."

"I don't want that," Davenant said hastily.

"But I do. It's a point of honour with me not to let another man shoulder——"

"And it's a point of honour with me, Rupert——"

"To stand by me," he broke in quickly.

"I can't see it that way. What you propose is entirely against my judgment. It's fantastic; it's unreal. I want you to understand that if you attempted to carry it out I shouldn't marry you. Whatever the consequences either to you or to me—I *shouldn't marry you.*"

"And if I didn't attempt it? Would you marry me then?"

She looked up, then down, then at Davenant, then away from him. Finally she fixed her gaze on Ashley.

"Yes," she said at last. "If you'll promise to let this wild project drop, I'll marry you whenever you like. I'll waive all the other difficulties——"

Davenant came forward, his hand outstretched. "I think I must say good-bye now, Miss Guion——"

"No; wait," Ashley commanded. "This matter concerns you, by Jove!"

Olivia sprang to her feet. "No; it doesn't, Rupert," she said hastily.

"No; it doesn't," Davenant repeated after her. "It's not my affair. I decline to be brought into it. I think I must say good-bye now, Miss Guion——"

"Listen, will you!" Ashley said impatiently. "I'm not going to say anything either of you need be afraid

of. I'm only asking you to do me the justice of trying to see things from my point of view. You may think it forced or artificial or anything you please; but unfortunately, as an officer and a gentleman, I've got to take it. The position you'd put me in would be this—of playing a game—and a jolly important game at that—in which the loser loses to me on purpose."

Ashley found much satisfaction in this way of putting it. Without exposing him to the necessity of giving details, it made clear his perception of what was going on. Moreover, it secured him *le beau rôle*, which for a few minutes he feared he might have compromised. In the look he caught, as it flashed between Olivia and Davenant, he saw the signs of that appreciation he found it so hard to do without—the appreciation of Rupert Ashley as the chivalrous Christian gentleman, at once punctilious and daring, who would count all things as loss in order to achieve the highest type of manhood. If in the back of his mind he had the conviction, hardly venturing to make itself a thought, "In the long run it pays," it was but little to his discredit, since he could scarcely have descended from a line of shrewd far-sighted Anglo-Saxon forefathers without making some such computation.

"If we're going to play a game," he continued, addressing Davenant, before the latter had time to speak, "for Heaven's sake let us play it straight—like men. Let the winner win and the loser lose——"

"I've no objection to that, Colonel, when I *do* play—but at present——"

"Look here," Ashley said, with a new inspiration; "I put it to you—I put it to you as a man—simply as a *man*—without any highfalutin principles whatever. Suppose I'd done what you've done—and given my bottom dollar——"

"But I haven't."

"We'll, no matter! Suppose I had done what you've done—and you were in my place—would you, as a

man—simply as a *man*, mind you—be willing to go off with the lady whom *I* had freed from great anxiety—to say the least—and be happy for ever after—and so forth—with nothing but a Thank-you-sir? Come now! Would you?"

It was evident that Davenant was shy of accepting this challenge. He coloured and looked uneasy—all the more so because Olivia lifted her eyes to him appealingly, as though begging him to come to her support. It was perhaps in the belief that he would do so that she said earnestly, leaning forward a little:

"Tell him, Mr. Davenant, tell him."

"I don't see what it's got to do with me——" Davenant began to protest.

"It's got everything to do with you," Ashley broke in. "Since you've created the situation you can't shirk its responsibilities."

"Tell him, Mr. Davenant, tell him," Olivia repeated. "Would you, or would you not?"

He looked helplessly from one to the other. "Well, then—I wouldn't," he said simply.

"There you are!" Ashley cried triumphantly, moving away from the wall and turning towards Olivia.

She was plainly disappointed. Davenant could so easily have said, "I would." Nevertheless, she answered quietly, picking up the paper-knife that lay on the table and turning it this way and that as though studying the tints of the mother-of-pearl in the dying light:

"It doesn't matter to me, Rupert, what other people would do or would not do. If you persist in this attempt—this mad attempt—I shall not marry you."

He strode to the table, looking down at her averted face and bent head.

"Then we're at a deadlock."

She gave him a quick glance. "No; it isn't a deadlock, because—because there's still a way out."

He leaned above her, supporting himself with his hand

on the table. "And it's a way I shall never take so long as you can't say—what you admitted a little while ago that you couldn't say——"

"I can't say it," she murmured, her face still further averted; "but all the same it's cruel of you to make it a condition."

He bent lower till his lips almost touched her hair.

"It's cruel of you," he whispered, "to put me in the position where I must."

The room and the hall behind it were now so dim that Davenant had no difficulty in slipping between the *portières* and getting away.

XVII

"HE'S going to squeeze me out."

This was Davenant's reflection as he walked back along the embankment to Rodney Temple's house. He made it bitterly, in the light of clarified views as to the ethics of giving and taking benefits. Up to within the last few days the subject had seemed to him a relatively simple one. If you had money and wished to give it away, you gave it. If you needed it, and were so lucky as to have it offered you, you took it. That was all. That such natural proceedings should create complicated relations and searchings of heart never entered his mind.

He could see that they might, however, now that the knowledge was forced upon him. Enlightenment came by the easy process of putting himself in Ashley's place. "I wouldn't take my wife as a kind of free gift from another fellow—I'll be hanged if I would! I'd marry her on my own or not at all."

And unless Ashley assumed the responsibilities of his future wife's position, he couldn't marry her "on his own." That much was clear. It was also the most

proper thing in the world. It was a right—a privilege. He looked upon it chiefly as a privilege. Ashley would sell his estate, and, having paid him—Davenant—the money he advanced, would send him about his business. There would be nothing left for him but to disappear. The minute there was no need for him there would be no place for him. He had been no more than the man who holds a horse till the owner comes and rides away.

Worse than that reflection was the fear that his intervention had been uncalled for in the first place. The belief that it was imperative had been his sole excuse for forcing himself on people who fought against his aid and professed themselves able to get along without it. But the event seemed to show that if he had let things alone, Rupert Ashley would have come and taken the burden on himself. As he was apparently able to shoulder it, it would have been better to let him do it. In that case he, Peter Davenant, would not have found himself in a position from which he could not withdraw, while it was a humiliation to be dislodged from it.

But, on the other hand, he would have missed his most wonderful experience. There was that side to it, too. He would not have had those moments face to face with Olivia Guion which were to be as food for his sustenance all the rest of his life. During these days of discussion, of argument, of conflict between his will and hers, he had the entirely conscious sense that he was laying up the treasure on which his heart would live as long as it continued to beat. The fact that she found intercourse with him more or less distasteful became a secondary matter. To be in her presence was the thing essential, whatever the grounds on which he was admitted there. In this way he could store up her looks, her words, her gestures against the time when the memory of them would be all he should have. As for her proposals of friendship made to him that day—her suggestions of visits to be paid to Ashley and

herself, with introductions to a greater world—he swep them aside. He quite understood that she was offerin him the two mites that make a farthing out of th penury of her resources, and, while he was touched b the attempt to repay him, he didn't want them.

He had said, and said again, that he didn't wan anything at all. Neither did he. It would have bee enough for him to go on as he was going now—to fetc and carry, to meet lawyers and pacify creditors, t protect her father because he *was* her father, and get glimpse of her or a word from her when he came on h errands to Tory Hill. There were analogies betwee his devotion and the adoration of a mortal for a godde beyond the stars. Like Hippolytus, he would have bee content that his Artemis should never step down from h shrine so long as he was permitted to lay his gifts on h altar.

At least, he had felt so till to-day. He had begu the adventure in the strength of the desire born o his visit to the scene of his father's work at Hanko to do a little good. True, it was an impulse of whic he was more than half ashamed. Its mere formulatio in words rendered it bumptious and presumptuou Beyond the confession made to Rodney Temple on th night of his arrival, no force could have induced hi to avow it. Better any imputation of craft than th suspicion of wanting to confer benefits on his fello men. It was a satisfaction to him to be able to sa even in his own inner consciousness, that the despera state of Guion's affairs forced his hand and compell him to a quixotic course which he would not otherwi have taken.

The first glimpse of Ashley brought this verbal shelt to the dust. So long as the accepted lover had be but an abstract conception Davenant had been al to think of him with toleration. But in presence of t actual man the feeling of antagonism was instinctiv animal, instantaneous. Though he pumped up h

hrases of welcome to a heartiness he did not feel, e was already saying to himself that his brief day f romance was done. "He's going to squeeze me ut." With this alert and capable soldier on the spot, here would be no need for a clumsy interloper any nger. They could do without him, and would be glad o see him go.

The upshot of it all was that he must retire. It was ot only the part of tact, but a gentleman could do o less. Ashley had all the rights and powers. The ort to withstand him would be worse than ineffectual, would be graceless. In Miss Guion's eyes it would e a blunder even more unpardonable than that for hich her punishment had been in some ways the ruling ctor in his life. He was sure she would not so punish im again, but her disdain would not be needed. Merely o be *de trop* in her sight, merely to be troublesome, ould be a chastisement from which he should suffer all he stings of shame. If he was to go on serving her ith the disinterestedness of which to himself, at any te, he had made a boast, if he was to keep the kindly eling she had perhaps begun to entertain for him, e must resign his provisional authority into Ashley's nds and efface himself.

To do that would be easy. He had only to advance y a few weeks his departure for Stoughton, Michigan, here he meant to return in any case. It was the miliar field of those opportunities in copper which he oped to profit by again. Once he was on that ground, livia Guion and her concerns would be as much a part a magic past as the woods and mountains of a holi- ay are to a man nailed down at an office desk. With very little explanation to Ashley he could turn his ack on the whole business and give himself up to his vn affairs.

He made an effort to recapture his zest in the old me, but after the passionate interest he had put into e past week the fun was out of it. Stroughton, Michi-

gan, presented itself as a ramshackle, filthy woode town of bar-rooms, eating-rooms, pool-rooms, and un speakable hotels. The joys and excitements he ha known over such deals as the buying and selling of th Catapult, the Peppermint, and the Etna mines were a flat now as the lees of yesternight's feast. "I'm not i love with her," he kept saying doggedly to himself and yet the thought of leaving Olivia Guion and he interests to this intrusive stranger, merely because h was supposed to have a prior claim, was sickening. I was more sickening still that the Englishman shoul not only be disposed to take up all the responsibilitie Davenant would be laying down, but seemed competen to do it.

On the embankment he met Rodney Temple, takin the air after his day in the Gallery of Fine Arts. H walked slowly, with a stoop, his hands behind hin Now and then he paused to enjoy the last tints of pin and purple and dusky saffron mirrored in the reache of the river or to watch the swing of some college cre and the swan-like movement of their long, frail shel

"Hello! Where are you off to? Home?"

Davenant had not yet raised this question with hin self, but now that it was before him he saw it was wort considering. Home, for the present, meant Drusilla an Mrs. Temple, with their intuitions and speculation their hints and sympathies. He scarcely knew whic he dreaded most, the old lady's inquisitive tenderness Drusilla's unsparing perspicacity.

"Not home just yet, sir," he had the wit to say. "I fact, I'm walking in to Boston, and may not be home dinner. Perhaps you'll tell Mrs. Temple so when yo go in. Then I shan't have to 'phone her."

Temple let that pass. "Been up to look at the gre man?"

Peter nodded. "Just come from there."

"And what do you make of him?"

"Oh, he's a decent sort."

"Not going to back out, eh?"

"Not at all; just the other way; he wants to step in
ıd take everything off—off our hands."

"You don't say so. Then he's what you say—a
ecent sort."

"He's more than that," Davenant heard himself say-
g, to his own surprise. "He's a fine specimen of his
pe, and the type itself——"

"Is superb," the old man concluded. "That's about
hat I supposed he'd be. You could hardly imagine
ivia Guion picking out any other kind—especially as
s a kind that's as thick as blackberries in their army."

Davenant corroborated this by a brief account of what
shley proposed to do. Light gleamed in the old man's
es and a smile broke the shaggy crevice between his
ard and moustache as he listened.

"Splendid! Splendid!" he commented, now at one
int and now at another of the information Peter was
parting. "Sell his estate and pay up? That's down-
ht sporting, isn't it?"

"Oh, he's sporting enough."

"And what a grand thing for you to get your money
ck. I thought you would some day—if Vic de Mel-
rt ever came to hear of what you'd done; but I
lu't expect it so soon."

Davenant turned away. "I wasn't in a hurry."

'No; but he is. That's the point. That's where
e beauty of it comes in for Olivia and you."

Peter looked blank. "Olivia and—*me?*"

'He's doing right," the old man explained, taking
ld of the lapel of Davenant's coat, "or what he
ıceives to be right; and no one man can do that
:hout putting us into a better position all round.
ing right," he continued, emphasizing his words by
.king the lapel and hammering on Peter's breast—
oing right is the solution of all the difficulties into
ich we get ourselves tied up by shilly-shallying and
ng wrong. If Ashley were to hang fire you wouldn't

know where the devil you were. But now that he' going straight, it leaves you free to do the same."

"It leaves me free to cut and run." He made littl effort to conceal his bitterness.

"Then cut and run, if that's what you feel impelle to do. You won't run far before you see you're runnin to a purpose. I'll cut and run, too," he added chee fully. "I'll be off to see Olivia, and tell her she's mad a catch."

Davenant was glad to be able to resume his tram "Poor old chap," he said to himself; "a lot he know about it! It's damned easy to do right when you' got everything your own way."

Having everything his own way was the happy positic in which he placed Rupert Ashley, seeing he was ab to marry Olivia Guion by the simple process of selli an estate. There was no more to that in Davenant estimation than to his own light parting with his stoc and bonds. Whatever sacrifice the act might ent would have ample compensation, since the giving t of the temporal and non-essential would secure supre and everlasting bliss. He would gladly have spared hand or an eye for a mere chance at the same rewar

Arrived in Boston there was nothing for him to but to eat an expensive dinner at a restaurant and back again. He did not return on foot. He had h enough of his own thoughts. They led him round a round in a circle without end. He was ashamed, t to perceive that they concerned themselves chiefly, n with his love for Olivia Guion, but with his enmity Rupert Ashley. It was the first time in his life th he was ever possessed by the fury to kill a man. wouldn't have been satisfied to be rid of Ashley; wanted to leap on him, to strike him, to choke hi to beat him to death. Sitting with his eyes fixed the tablecloth, from which the waiter had remov everything but the finger-bowl and the bill, and allo ing the cigar that protruded between his knuckles

urn uselessly, he had already indulged in these imagin-
ry exercises, not a little to his relief, before he shook
imself and muttered: "I'm a damned fool!"

The repetition of this statement, together with the
ull belief that repetition engenders, braced him at last
o paying his bill and taking the tram-car to Waverton.
e had formed a resolution. It was still early, scarcely
ter than the hour at which he usually dined. He had
long evening before him. He would put it to use
y packing his belongings. Then he would disappear.
e might go at once to Stoughton, or he might travel
o farther than the rooms he had engaged, and which he
id occupied in former years, on the less attractive slope
Beacon Hill. It would be all the same. He would
out of the circle of interests that centred round
ivia Guion, and so free to come back to his
uses.

He got so much elation out of this resolve that from
e electric car to Rodney Temple's house he walked
th a swinging stride, whistling tunelessly beneath his
eath. He tried to think he was delivered from an
traordinary obsession and restored to health and
ity. He planned to initiate Ashley as the new
argé d'affaires without the necessity on his part of
ing Miss Guion again.

And yet, when he opened the door with his latchkey
l saw a note lying on the table in the hall, his heart
unded as though it meant to stop beating. It was
er premonition that made him think the letter was
him. He stooped and read the address before he
l taken off his hat and while he was still tugging
his gloves:

"Peter Davenant, Esq.,
"31 Charlesbank."

t was premonition again that told him the contents
ore he had read a line;

DEAR MR. DAVENANT,—If you are quite free this
ning, could you look in on me again? Don't come

unless you have really nothing else to do.—Yours sincerely,

"OLIVIA GUION."

He looked at his watch. It was only half-past eight "I've no excuse for not going," he said to himself He made it clear to his heart that he regretted the necessity. After the brave decisions to which he had come, decisions which he might have put into execution, it was a call backward, a retrogression. He began already to be afraid that he might not be so resolute a second time. But he had no excuse for not going That fact took the matter out of his hands. There was nothing to do but to crumple the letter into his pocket take down his evening overcoat from its peg, and leave the house before any one knew he had entered.

The night was mild. It was so soft and scented that it might have been in June. From the stars and the street-lamps and the line of electrics along the water's edge there was just light enough to show the surface of the river, dim and metallic, and the wisps of vapour hovering above the marshes. In the east, toward Cambridge and beyond Boston, the sky was bright with the simulation of the dawn that precedes the moonrise.

His heart was curiously heavy. If he walked rapidly it was none the less reluctantly. For the first time since he had taken part and lot in the matter in hand he had no confidence in himself. He had ceased to be able to say, "I'm not in love with her," while he had no other strengthening formula to put in its place.

Algonquin Avenue, which older residents still called Rodney Lane, was as still and deserted as a country road. The entry gate to Tory Hill clicked behind him with curious, lonely loudness. The gravel crunched the same way beneath his tread. Looking up at the house, he saw neither light nor sign of living. There was something stricken and sinister about the place.

He was half-way toward the front door when a white figure came forward beneath the Corinthian portico. it had not been so white he couldn't have seen it.

"I'm here, Mr. Davenant."

The voice, too, sounded lonely, like a voice in a vast, empty house. He crossed the lawn to the portico. Olivia had already reseated herself in the wicker chair from which she had risen at his approach.

"Aren't you afraid of taking cold?" She had not offered him her hand; both hands were hidden in the folds of her voluminous wrap. He said the simplest thing he could think of.

"No. I'm wearing a very warm fur-lined cloak. It's very long, too. I couldn't stay indoors. The house seemed so—so dead."

"Is there nobody with you?"

"Colonel Ashley went back to town before dinner. Papa wasn't quite so well. He's trying to sleep. Will you sit down on the step, or go in and bring out a chair? But perhaps you'll find it chilly. If so, we'll go in."

She half rose, but he checked her. "Not at all. I like it here. It's one of our wonderful, old-fashioned Octobers, isn't it? Besides, I've got an overcoat."

He threw the coat over his shoulders, seating himself on the floor, with his feet on the steps below him and his back to one of the fluted Corinthian pilasters. The shadow was so deep on this side of the house—the side remote from the approaching moonrise—that they could see each other but dimly. Of the two she was the more visible, not only because she was in white, but because the light coming through the open sitting-room behind her from the hall in the middle of the house. In his faint glimmer he could see the pose of her figure in the deep wicker arm-chair and the set of her neat head with its heavy coil of hair.

"I asked you to come," she said simply, "because I feel so helpless."

"That's a very good reason," he responded guardedly. "I'm glad you thought of me, rather than of any one else."

He was pleased to note that even to his own ears his

accent was polite, but no more. At the same minute he found the useful formula he had been in search of—"I mustn't let her know I'm in love with her."

"There's no one else for me to think of," she explained, in self-excuse. "If there were, I shouldn't bother you."

"That's not so kind," he said, keeping to the tone of conventional gallantry.

"I don't mean that I haven't plenty of friends. I know lots of people—naturally; but I don't know them in a way to appeal to them like this."

"Then so much the better for me."

"That's not a reason for my imposing on your kindness; and yet I'm afraid I must go on doing it. I feel like a person in such desperate straits for ready money that he's reckless of the rate of interest. Not that it's a question of money now—exactly."

"It doesn't matter what it's a case of. I'm at your service, Miss Guion——"

"I know. That's why I asked you to come. I want you to keep Colonel Ashley from doing what he proposed this afternoon."

She spoke more abruptly, more nervously, than was her habit.

"I would if I could; but I don't know that I've any way of dissuading him."

"You needn't dissuade him. You've simply to refuse to take his money."

"It's not quite so easy as that, because there's no direct business between him and me. If Mr. Guion wanted to pay me what I've lent him, I couldn't decline to accept it. Do you see?"

In the dim light he noticed her head nodding slowly. "Oh, so that's the way it is? It would have to be done through papa?"

"It would have to be done through him. And if he preferred to use Colonel Ashley's money rather than mine, I should have nothing at all to say."

"I see; I see," she commented thoughtfully. "And I don't know how papa would feel about it, or how far I could count on him."

For a few minutes Davenant said nothing. When he spoke it was with some amazment at his own temerity. "I thought you didn't want my help, if you could possibly get any other?"

The words took her by surprise. He could see her draw her cloak more tightly about her, her hands still within its folds.

"I felt that way at first. I don't now. Perhaps I understand you a little better. But, in any case, I couldn't take his."

He pushed the liberty a little further. "But if you're going to marry him——"

"That's just it. I wonder if you've the faintest idea of what it means to a woman to marry a man by making herself a burden to him in advance—and such a burden!"

"It wouldn't be a burden to any one who—who——"

"I know what you're going to say. Love does make a difference. Of course. But it acts one way on the man and another way on the woman. In proportion as it urges him to make the sacrifice it impels her to prevent it."

He grew still bolder. The cover of the night and the intimacy of the situation made him venturesome. "Then why don't you break off your engagement?"

It was a long while before she answered. "He won't let me," she said then. "And besides," she added, after slight hesitation, "it's difficult not to be true to a man who's showing himself so noble."

"Is that your only reason?"

She raised her head slightly and turned toward him. He expected something cutting, but she only said: "What makes you ask that?"

He was a little frightened. He backed down, and yet not altogether. "Oh, nothing. I only—wondered."

"If you think I don't care for him——"

"Oh, no. Not that—not that at all."

"Well, if you *were* to think it, it would probably be because I've been through so much—I'm *going* through so much—that that sort of thing has become secondary"

"I didn't know that—that sort of thing—was ever secondary."

"Because you've never had the experience. If you had——"

The freedom of speech she seemed to be according him led him on to say:

"I've had experience enough—as you may know—to be sure it wouldn't be secondary with me."

She seemed willing to discuss the point. "When I say secondary I mean that I'm in a position in which I find it isn't the most important thing in the world to me to marry the man I—I care for."

"Then, what *is* the most important thing?"

She stirred impatiently. "Oh, it's no use going into that; I suppose it would be—to be free—not to owe you anything—or anybody anything—to be out of this big, useless house—away from these unpaid servants—and—and free! I'm not a dependent person. I dare say you've noticed that. I shouldn't mind having no money. I know a way by which I could support myself—and papa. I've thought that out. I shouldn't mind being alone in the world, either—if I could only burst the coil that's been wound about me."

"But since you can't," he said, rather cruelly "wouldn't the next best thing be—to marry the man you care for?"

Her response was to say, irrelevantly, somewhat quaveringly, in a voice as near to tears as he could fancy her coming: "I wish I hadn't fallen out with Aunt Vic."

"Why? Would she help you?"

"She's very good and kind—in her way."

"Why don't you write to her?"

"Writing wouldn't be any good now. It's too late."

Another long silence fell between them. The darkened windows of the house on the other side of the lawn began to reflect a pallid gleam as the moon rose. Shadows of trees and of clumps of shrubbery became faintly visible on the grass. The great rounded elm in the foreground detached itself against the shimmering, illuminated sky like an open fan. Davenant found something ecstatic in the half-light, the peace, and the extraordinary privilege of being alone with her. It would be one more memory to treasure up. Silence, too, was a form of communion more satisfactory to him than speech. It was so full of unutterable things that he wondered at her allowing it to last.

Nevertheless, it was he who broke it. The evening grew chilly at last. Somewhere in the town a clock struck ten. He felt it would be indiscreet to stay longer.

"I'll made a try for it, Miss Guion," he said, when he had got on his feet to go away. "Since you want me to see Colonel Ashley, I will."

"They always say that one man has such influence on another," she said, rising too—"and you see things so clearly and have such a lot of common sense. . . I'll walk down to the gate with you. . . I'm tired with sitting still."

He offered his hand to help her in descending the portico steps. Though there was no need for her to take it, she did so. The white cloak, loosely gathered in one hand in front, trailed behind her. He thought her very spirit-like and ethereal.

At the foot of the steps his heart gave a great bound; he went hot and cold. It seemed to him—he was sure she could have sworn—that her hand rested in his a perceptible instant longer than there was any need for.

A moment later he was scoffing at the miracle. It was a mistake on his part, or an accident on hers. It was the mocking of his own desire, the illusion of his

feverish, overstrained senses. It was a restorative to say to himself: "Don't be a damned fool."

And yet they walked to the gate almost in silence. It was a silence without embarrassment, like that which had preceded it. It had some of the qualities of the silence which goes with long-established companionships. He spoke but once, to remind her, protectingly, that the grass was damp, and to draw her—almost tactually—to the gravelled path.

They came to the gate, but he did not immediately say good night.

"I wish you could throw the burden of the whole thing on me, Miss Guion," he ventured wistfully, "and just take it easy."

She looked away from him, over the sprinkling of lights that showed the town. "If I could do it with any one, it would be with you—now."

There was an inflection on the *now* which again gave him strange and sudden thrills, as though some extraordinary chemical agent had been infused into his blood. All kinds of capitulations were implied in it—changes of heart and mind and attitude—changes that had come about imperceptibly, and for reasons which he, and perhaps she, could not have followed. He felt the upleaping of great joy. It was joy so intense that it made him tactful, temperate. It also made him want to rush away and be alone.

"I'll make that do for the present," he said, smiling down at her through the darkness. "Thank you for letting me come. Good-night."

"Good-night."

There was again that barely noticeable lingering of her hand in his. The repetition rather disappointed him. "It's just her way of shaking hands," was the explanation he gave of it.

When he had passed out of the gate he pretended to take his way down Algonquin Avenue, but he only crossed the street to the shelter of a friendly elm. There

he could watch her tall, white figure as it went slowly up the driveway. Except for a dim light in the fan-shaped window over the front door the house was dark. The white figure moved with an air of dragging itself along.

"It isn't the most important thing in the world for her," he whispered to himself, "to marry—*the man she cares for.*"

There was a renewal of his blind fury against Ashley, while at the same time he found himself groaning inwardly: "I wish to God the man she cares for wasn't such a—such a—trump!"

XVIII

WHEN the colonel of the Sussex Rifles woke on the following morning the Umfraville element in him, fatigued doubtless with the demands of the previous day, still slept on. That strain in him which had made his maternal ancestors gentlemen-adventurers in Tudor times, and cavaliers in the days of Charles the First, and Jacobites with James the Second, and roisterers with George the Fourth—loyal, swashbuckling, and impractical, daring, dashing, lovable, absurd, bound to come to grief one day or another, as they had come—that strain lying dormant, Ashley was free to wake in the spirit of the manufacturer of brushes. In other words, he woke in alarm. It was very real alarm. It was alarm not unlike that of the gambler who realizes in the cold stare of morning that for a night's excitement he has thrown away a fortune.

The feeling was so dreadful that, as he lay for a few minutes with his eyes closed, he could say without exaggeration that he had never felt anything so sickening in his life. It was worse than the blue funk that attended the réveillé for his first battle—worse than the bluer remorse that had come with the dawn after some

of his more youthful sprees. The only parallel to it he could find was in the desolation of poor creatures he had seen, chiefly in India, reduced suddenly by fire, flood, or earthquake to the skin they stood in and a lodging on the ground. His swaggering promises of yesterday had brought him as near as possible to that.

Fortunately, when he had sprung out of bed the feeling became less poignant. By the time he had had his bath and his breakfast it had got itself within the limits of what could be expressed in the statement: "I've been a jolly ass."

Though there was no denying this fact, he could nevertheless use the reproach in its precise signification. He was not a jolly ass because he had remained true to Olivia Guion, but because of the extravagant methods of his faithfulness. No one but an Umfraville, he declared, would have hesitated to accept the *status quo*. Considering that in spite of everything he was still eager to give Olivia the shelter of his name and the advantages of his position, his insistence on doing more fell short of the grotesque.

Nevertheless he had insisted on it, and it was too late to shrink from making good his offer. No doubt, if he did so shrink, Olivia would commend him; but it would be a commendation not inconsistent with a fall in her esteem. His nerves still tingled with the joy of hearing her say, as she had said yesterday: "You're the noblest man in the world; I never dreamed there could be any one like you." She was so sparing with her words that these meant more from her than from another. If she used them, it was because she thought he *was* the noblest man in the world and because he *did* surpass her dreams. This was setting up the standard in a way that permitted no falling short of it. He must be Rupert Ashley at his best even if the world went to pieces while he made the attempt. Moreover, if he failed, there was always Peter Davenant ready to loom up above him. "I must keep higher than him," he said to himself, "whatever it costs

me." So, little by little, the Umfraville in him also woke, with its daredevil chivalry. It might be said to have urged him on, while the Ashley prudence held him back, when from his room in the hotel he communicated by telephone with Olivia, begging her to arrange an interview between Guion and himself about eleven o'clock.

On taking the message to her father Olivia found him awake, but still in bed. Since his downfall had become generally known, she had noticed a reluctance on his part to get up. It was true he was not well; but his shrinking from activity was beyond what his degree of illness warranted. It was a day or two before she learned to view this seeming indolence as nothing but the desire to creep, for as many hours as possible out of the twenty-four, into the only refuge left to him. In his bed he was comparatively safe, not from the law, which he no longer had to fear, but from intrusion and inspection, and, above all, from sympathy.

It was between nine and ten o'clock. The blinds were up, the windows open, and the sunshine was streaming in. A tray with his scarcely tasted breakfast on it stood beside the bed. Guion lay on his back, his head sunk deep into the pillows. Though his face was turned from the door and his eyes closed, Olivia knew he was not sleeping. After performing small tasks in the room, carrying the breakfast tray into the hall, and lowering the blinds, she sat down at the bedside.

"Papa, darling."

As he turned his head slowly she thought his eyes had the look of mortal ennui that Rembrandt depicts in those of Lazarus rising from the tomb and coming back to life.

She delivered her message, to which he replied, "He can come."

"I think I ought to tell you," she continued, "what he's coming for."

She gave him the gist of her conversations with

Ashley on the previous day and the one great decision to which they had led him up. It would have gratified Ashley, could he have overheard, to note the skill with which she conveyed precisely that quality of noble precipitancy in his words and resolutions which he himself feared they had lacked. If a slight suspicion could have risen in his mind, it would have been that of a certain haste on her part to forestall any possible questioning of his eagerness such as he had occasion to observe in himself. That might have wounded him.

"So he wants to go ahead," Guion said, when she had finished.

"Apparently."

"Can't he do that and still leave things as they are?"

"He seems to think he can't."

"I don't see why. If I have to owe the money to anyone, I'd rather owe it to Davenant."

"So should I."

"Do you really want to marry him?"

The question startled her. "Marry him? Who?"

There was a look almost of humour in Guion's forlorn eyes. "Well, I didn't mean Davenant. I didn't suppose there was any——"

"Papa, darling," she hastened to say, "as things are at present I'd rather not marry anyone at all. There's so much for me to do in getting life on another footing for us both that marriage seems to belong to another kind of world."

He raised himself on his elbow, turning towards her. "Then why don't you tell him so?"

"I have; but he won't take that as a reason. And, besides, I've said I *would* marry him if he'd give up this wild project——"

"But you're in love with him, aren't you? You may as well tell me," he continued, as she coloured. "I must have *some* data to go on."

"I—I *was* in love with him," she faltered. "I suppose I am still. But while everything is as it is, I—I—

can't tell; I—I don't know. I'm—I'm feeling so many other things that I don't know whether I feel—feel love—or not. I dare say I do. But it's like asking a man if he's fond of playing a certain game when he thinks he's going to die."

He slipped down into bed again, pulling the coverlet about his chin and turning his face away. As he said nothing more, she rose to go. "About eleven, then, papa dear."

She could hear a muffled assent as she left the room. She was afraid he was crying.

Nevertheless, when she had gone Guion rang for Reynolds and made his usual careful toilet with uncommon elaboration. By the time his guest arrived he was brushed and curled and stretched on the couch. If he had in the back of his mind a hope of impressing Ashley and showing him that if he, Guion, had fallen, it was from a height, he couldn't help it. To be impressive was the habit of his life—a habit it was too late now to overcome. Had he taken the Strange Ride with Morrowby Jukes, he would have been impressive among the living dead. Curiously enough, too, now that that possibility was past, he wondered if he didn't regret it. He confessed as much to Ashley.

"I know what you've come for," he said, when Ashley, who had declined a cigar, seated himself beside the couch.

"That means, I suppose, that Olivia has got ahead of me."

"She told me what you've proposed. It's very fine—very sporting."

"I haven't proposed it because it's either sporting or fine. It seems to me the only thing to do."

"Y-es! I can understand that you should feel so about it. I should myself if I were in your place and had a right to be generous. The trouble is—that it wouldn't work."

Ashley would have given much not to feel this sudden

xhilaration of relief. It was so glowing that, in spite of his repugnance, he could have leaned forward and wrung Guion's hand. He contrived, however, to throw a tone of objection into his voice as he said: "Wouldn't work? Why not?"

Guion raised himself on his elbow. "It's no use going over the arguments as to the effect on your position. You've considered all that, no doubt, and feel that you can meet it. Whether you could or not when it came to the point is another question. But no matter. There are one or two things you haven't considered. I hate to put them before you, because—well, because you're a fine fellow—and it's too bad that you should be in this fix. It's part of my—my—chastisement—to have put you there; but it'll be something to me—some alleviation if you can understand—to help to get you out."

Ashley was dumb. He was also uncomfortable. He hated this sort of thing.

Guion continued. "Suppose I were to let you go ahead on this—let you raise the money—and take it from you—and pay Davenant—and all that—then you might marry my daughter, and get life on some sort of tolerable working basis. I dare say." He pulled himself forward on the couch. Ashley noticed the blazing of his eyes and hectic colour in his cheeks. "You might even be happy, in a way," he went on, "if you didn't have—*me*."

"Didn't have—you? I don't understand——"

"And you'd *have* me. You couldn't get out of it. I'm done for—I'm no good to any one any more—but I'm not going to die. That's my point. That's my punishment, too. Can't you imagine what it means to a man like me—who used to think well of himself—who's been well thought of—can't you imagine what it is to have to inspire every one who belongs to him with loathing? That's what I've got to do for the rest of my life—and I'm going to *live*."

"Oh, I say!"

"You mayn't believe it, Ashley, but I'd rather have been—shut up—put away—where people couldn't see me—where I didn't have to see them. You know Olivia and I were facing that. I expect she's told you. And 'pon my soul there are many ways in which it would have been easier than—than this. But that's not what I'm coming to. The great fact is that after you'd counted your cost and done your utmost you'd still have *me*—like a dead rat—strung round your neck——"

"Oh, I say, by Jove!"

"Olivia, poor child, has to bear it. She can, too. That's a remarkable thing about us New England people—our grit in the face of disgrace. I fancy there are many of our women who'd be as plucky as she—and I know one man. I don't know any others."

Ashley felt sick. He had never in his life felt such repulsion as towards what seemed to him this facile, theatrical remorse. If Guion was really contrite, if he really wanted to relieve the world of his presence, he could blow his brains out. Ashley had known, or known of, so many who had resorted to this ready remedy for a desperate plight that it seemed simple. His thoughts were too complex, however, for immediate expression, and, before he could decide what to respond, Guion said:

"Why don't you give him a chance?"

Ashley was startled. "Chance? What chance? Who?"

"Davenant."

Ashley grasped the back of his chair as though about to spring up. "What's he want a chance for? Chance for what?"

"I might have said: 'Why don't you give *her* a chance?' She's half in love with him—as it is."

"That's a lie! That's an infernal lie!"

Ashley was on his feet. He pushed the chair from him, though he still grasped it. He seemed to need it for support. Guion showed no resentment, continuing to speak with feverish quiet.

"I think you'll find that the whole thing is predestined, Ashley. Davenant's coming to my aid is what you might call a miracle. I don't like to use the expression—it sounds idiotic—and canting—and all that—but, as a matter of fact, he came—as an answer to prayer."

Ashley gave a snort of impatience. Guion warmed to his subject, dragging himself farther up on the couch and throwing the coverlet from his knees.

"Yes, of course; you'd feel that way about it—naturally. So should I if anybody else were to tell me. But this is how it happened. One night, not long ago, while you were on the water, I was so hard hit that I—well, I actually—*prayed*. I don't know that I ever did before—that is, not really—*pray*. But I did then; and I didn't beat about the bush, either. I didn't stop at half measures; I asked for a miracle right out and out—and I got it. The next morning Davenant came with his offer of the money. You may make what you like out of that; but I make——"

"I make this, by Jove; that you and he entered into a bargain that he should supply the cash, and you should——"

"Wrong!" With his arm stretched to its full length he pointed his forefinger up into Ashley's face "Wrong!" he cried again. "I asked him if she had anything to do with it, and he said she hadn't."

"Pff! Would you expect him to acknowledge it? He might deny it till he damned his soul with lies; but that wouldn't keep you and him from——"

"Before God, Ashley, I never thought of it till later. I know it looks that way—the way you put it—but I never thought of it till later. I dragged it out of him that he'd once been in love with her and had asked her to marry him. That was a regular knock-down surprise to me. I'd had no idea of anything of the kind. But he said he wasn't in love with her any longer. I dare say he thinks he isn't; but——"

"Suppose he is; that needn't affect *her*—except as

an impertinence. A woman can defend herself against that sort of thing, by Jove!"

"It needn't affect her—only—only as a matter of fact—it does. It appeals to her imagination. The big scale of the thing would impress almost any woman. Look here, Ashley," he cried, with a touch of hysteria; "it'll be better for us all in the long run if you'll give him a chance. It'll be better for you than for anyone else. You'll be well out of it—any impartial person would tell you that. You must see it yourself. You *do* see it yourself. We're not your sort——"

But Ashley could stand it no longer. With a smothered, inarticulate oath, he turned abruptly and marched out of the room.

XIX

FORTUNATELY there was no one in the upper hall, nor on the stairs, nor in the lower hall, nor in the oval room into which Ashley stumbled his way. The house was all sunshine and silence.

He dropped into the nearest arm-chair. "It's a lie," he kept repeating to himself. "It's a lie. It's a damned, infernal lie. It's a put-up job between them—between the old scoundrel and that—that oaf."

The reflection brought him comfort. By degrees it brought him a great deal of comfort. That was the explanation of course! There was no need of his being panic-stricken. To frighten him off was part of their plan. Had he not challenged her two or three times to say she didn't care for him? If she had any doubt on the subject he had given her ample opportunity to declare it. But she had not done so. On the contrary, she had made him both positive and negative statements of her love. What more could he ask?

He breathed again. The longer he thought of it the better his situation seemed to grow. He had done all

that an honourable man could think of. He had been chivalrous to a quixotic degree. If they had not accepted his generous proposals, then so much the worse for them. They—Guion and Davenant—were pursuing obstructionist tactics, so as to put him in a place where he could do nothing but retreat. Very well; he would show them! There were points beyond which even chivalry could not go; and if they found themselves tangled in their own barbed wire they themselves would be to blame.

So, as the minute of foolish, jealous terror passed away, he began to enjoy the mellow peace of the old house. It was the first thing he had enjoyed since landing in America. His pleasure was largely in the anticipation of soon leaving that country with all the honours and Olivia Guion besides.

It was a gratification to the Ashley spirit, too, to note how promptly the right thing had paid. It was really something to take to heart. The moral to be drawn from his experiences at the heights of Dargai had been illustrated over and over again in his career; and this was once more. If he had funked the sacrifice it would have been on his conscience all the rest of his life. As it was, he had made it, or practically made it, and so could take his reward without scruple.

He put this plainly before Olivia when at last she appeared. She came slowly through the hall from the direction of the dining-room, a blank book and a pencil in her hand.

"I'm making an inventory," she explained. "You know that everything will have to be sold?"

He ignored this to hurry to his account of the interview with Guion. It had been brief, he said, and in a certain sense unsatisfactory. He laid stress on his regret that her father should have seen fit to decline his offer—that's what it amounted to—but he pointed out to her that that bounder Davenant, who had doubtless counselled this refusal, would now be the victim of his own wiles. He had overreached himself. He had

taken one of those desperate risks to which the American speculative spirit is so often tempted—and he had pushed it too far. He would lose everything now, and serve him right.

"I've made my offer," he went on, in an injured tone, "and they've thrown it out. I really can't do more, now, can I?"

"You know already how I feel about that."

They were still standing. He had been too eager to begin his report to offer her a chair or to take one himself.

"They can't expect me to repeat it, now, can they?" he hurried on. "There are limits, by Jove! I can't go begging to them——"

"I don't think they expect it."

"And yet, if I don't, you know—he's dished. He loses his money—and everything else."

In putting a slight emphasis on the concluding words he watched her closely. She betrayed herself to the extent of throwing back her head with a little tilt to the chin.

"I don't believe he'd consider that being dished. He's the sort of man who loses only when he—flings away."

"He's the sort of man who's a beastly cad."

He regretted these words as soon as they were uttered, but she had stung him to the quick. Her next words did so again.

"Then, if so, I hope you won't find it necessary to repeat the information. I mistook him for something very high—very high and noble; and, if you don't mind, I'd rather go on doing it."

She swept him with a look such as he knew she must be capable of giving, though he had never before seen it. The next second she had slipped between the *portières* into the hall. He heard her pause there.

It was inevitable that Guion's words should return to him: "Half in love with him—as it is."

"That's rot," he assured himself. He had only to

call up the image of Davenant's hulking figure and heavy ways to see what rot it was. He himself was not vain of his appearance; he had too much to his credit to be obliged to descend to that; but he knew he was a distinguished man, and that he looked it. The woman who could choose between him and Davenant would practically have no choice at all. That seemed to him conclusive.

Nevertheless, it was with a view to settling this question beyond resurrection that he followed her into the hall. He found her standing with the notebook still in her hand.

He came softly behind her and looked over her shoulder, his face close to hers. She could feel his breath on her cheek, but she tried to write.

"I'm sorry I said what I did," he whispered.

She stayed her pencil long enough to say: "I hope you're still sorrier for having thought it."

"I'm sorry you *know* I think it. Since it affects you so deeply——"

"It affects me deeply to see you can be unjust."

"I'm more than unjust. I'm—well, you can fancy what I am, when I say that I know some one who thinks you're more than half in love with this fellow—as it is."

"Is that papa?"

"I don't see that it matters who it is. The only thing of importance is whether you are or not."

"If you mean that as a question, I shall have to let you answer it yourself."

"Would you tell me if—if you were?"

"What would be the use of telling you a thing that would make you unhappy and that I couldn't help?"

"Am I to understand, then, that you *are* half in love with him?"

She continued the effort to write.

"I think I've a right to press that question," he resumed. "Am I, or am I not, to understand——"

She turned slowly. Her face was flushed, her eyes were misty.

"You may understand this," she said, keeping her voice as much under control as possible, "you may understand this, that I don't know whom I'm in love with, or whether or not I'm in love with anyone. That's the best I can say. I'm sorry, Rupert—but I don't think it's altogether my fault. Papa's troubles seem to have transported me into a world where they neither marry nor are given in marriage—where the whole subject is alien to——"

"But you said," he protested bitterly, "no longer ago than yesterday that you—*loved* me."

"And I suppose I do. I did in Southsea. I did—right up to the minute when I learned what papa—and I—had been doing all these years—and that if the law had been put in force—— You see, that's made me feel as if I were benumbed—as if I were frozen—or dead. You mustn't blame me too much——"

"My darling, I'm not blaming you. I'm not such a duffer but that I can understand how you feel. It'll be all right. You'll come round. This is like an illness, by Jove!—that's what it's like. But you'll get better, dear. After we're married—if you'll *only* marry me——"

"I said I'd do that, Rupert—— I said it yesterday—if you'd give up—what I understand you *have* given up——"

He was on his guard against admitting this. "I haven't given it up. They've made it impossible for me to do it; that's all. It's their action—not mine."

"It comes to the same thing. I'm ready to keep my promise."

"You don't say it with much enthusiasm."

"Perhaps I say it with something better. I think I do. At the same time I wish——"

"You wish what?"

"I wish I had attached another condition to it."

"It mayn't be too late for that even now. Let's have it."

"If I had thought of it," she said, with a faint, uncertain smile, "I should have exacted a promise that you and he should be friends."

He spoke sharply. "Who? Me? That's a good 'un, by Jove! You may as well understand me, dear, once and for all. I don't make friends of cow-punchers of that sort."

"I do," she said coldly, turning again to her notebook.

It was not strange that Ashley should pass the remainder of the day in a state of irritation against what he called "this American way of doing things." Neither was it strange that when, after dinner in the evening, Davenant kept close to him as they were leaving Rodney Temple's house, the act should have struck the Englishman as a bit of odious presumption. Having tried vainly to shake his companion off, he was obliged to submit to walking along the embankment with him, side by side.

He had not found the dinner an entertaining event. Drusilla talked a good deal, but was uneasy and distraite. Rodney Temple seemed to him "a queer old cove," while Mrs. Temple made no impression on him at all. Olivia had urged her inability to leave her father as an excuse for not coming. Davenant said little beyond giving the information that he was taking leave of his host and hostess to sleep that night in his old quarters in Boston and proceed next day to Stoughton, Michigan. This fact gave him a pretext for saying good-night when Ashley did and leaving the house in his company.

"We're going the same way, aren't we?" he asked, as soon as they were outside.

"No," Ashley said promptly; "you're taking the tram, and I shall walk."

"I should like to walk, too, Colonel, if you don't mind."

Since silence raised the most telling objection, Ashley made no reply. Taking out his cigarette-case, he lit a cigarette, without offering one to his companion. The discourtesy was significant, but Davenant ignored it, commenting on the extraordinary mildness of the October night and giving items of information as to the normal behaviour of American autumn weather. As Ashley expressed no appreciation of these data, the subject was dropped. There was a long silence before Davenant nerved himself to begin on the topic he had sought this opportunity to broach.

"You said yesterday, Colonel, that you'd like to pay me back the money I've advanced to Mr. Guion. I'd just as soon you wouldn't, you know."

Ashley deigned no answer. The tramp went on in silence, broken only by distant voices or a snatch of song from a student's club-house near the river. Somewhere in the direction of Brookline a locomotive kept up a puffing like the beating of a pulse.

"I don't need that money," Davenant began again. "There's more where it came from. I shall be out after it—from to-morrow on."

Ashley's silence was less from rudeness than from self-restraint. All his nerves were taut with the need to visit his troubles on some one's head. A soldiering life had not accustomed him to indefinite repression of his irritable impulses, and now, after two or three days of it, he was at the limit of his powers. It was partly because he knew his patience to be nearly at an end that he wanted to be alone. It was also because he was afraid of the blind fury with which Davenant's mere presence inspired him. While he expressed this fury to himself in epithets of scorn, he was aware, too, that there were shades of animosity in it for which he had no ready supply of terms. Such exclamatory fragments as forced themselves up through the troubled incoherence of his thoughts were of the nature of "damned American," "vulgar Yankee," "insolent bounder,"

rendering but inadequately the sentiments of a certain kind of Englishman towards his fancied typical American, a crafty Colossus who accomplishes everything by money and brutal strength. Had there been nothing whatever to create a special antagonism between them, Ashley's feeling would still have been that of a civilized Jack-the-Giant-Killer toward a stupendous, uncouth foe. It would have had elements in it of fear, jealousy, even of admiration, making at its best for suspicion and neutrality, and at its worst for. . . But Davenant spoke again.

"I'd a great deal rather, Colonel, that——"

The very sound of his voice, with its harsh consonants and its absurd repetitions of the military title, grated insufferably on Ashley's ear. He was beyond himself although he seemed cool.

"My good fellow, I don't care a hang what you'd a great deal rather."

Ashley lit a fresh cigarette with the end of the old one, throwing the stump into the river almost across Davenant's face, as the latter walked the nearer to the railing.

The American turned slightly and looked down. The action, taken in conjunction with his height and size and his refusal to be moved, intensified Ashley's rage, which began now to round on himself. Even the monotonous tramp-tramp of their footsteps, as the embankment became more deserted, got on his nerves. It was long before Davenant made a new attempt to fulfil his mission.

"In saying what I said just now," he began, in what he tried to make a reasonable tone, "I've no axe to grind for myself. If Miss Guion——"

"We'll leave that name out," Ashley cried sharply. "Only a damned cad would introduce it."

Though the movement with which Davenant swung his left arm through the darkness and with the back of his left hand struck Ashley on the mouth was so

sudden as to surprise no one more than himself, it came with all the cumulative effect of twenty-four hours' brooding. The same might be said of the spring with which Ashley bounded on his adversary. It had the agility and strength of a leopard's. Before Davenant had time to realize what he had done he found himself staggering—hurled against the iron railing, which threatened to give way beneath his weight. He had not taken breath when he was flung again. In the dim light of the electrics he could see the glare in Ashley's eyes and hear him panting. Davenant, too, panted, but his wrath that had flared up like a rocket had already come down like a stick.

"Look here," he stammered; "we—we—c-can't do this sort of thing."

Ashley fell back. He, too, seemed to realize quickly the folly of the situation. When he spoke it was less in anger than in protest.

"By God, you struck me!"

"I didn't know it, Colonel. If I did, we're quits on it—because—because you insulted me. Perhaps you didn't know *that*. I'm willing to think you didn't—if you'll only believe that the whole thing has been a mistake—a damned, idiotic, tomfool mistake."

The words had their effect. Ashley fell back still farther. There was a sinking of his head and a shrinking of his figure that told of reaction from the moment of physical excess.

A roadside bench was visible beneath an arc lamp but a few yards away. "Come and sit down," Davenant said hoarsely. He found it difficult to speak.

Ashley stumbled along. He sat down heavily, like a man spent with fatigue or drink. With his elbows on his knees, he hid his face in his hands, while his body rocked.

Davenant turned away, walking down the embankment. He walked on for fifty or sixty yards. He himself felt a curious sense of being battered and used up.

His heart pounded and the perspiration stood on his brow. Putting his hand to his collar, he found his evening cravat awry and his waistcoat pulled out of shape.

He grasped the rail, as if for support, looking off with unseeing eyes into the night. Lights along the river-side were reflected in the water; here and there a bridge made a long low arch of lamps; more lights sprinkled the suburban hills, making a fringe to the pall of stars. They grew pale, even while he looked at them, as before a brighter radiance, and he knew that behind him the moon was coming up. He thought of the moonrise of the previous evening, when Olivia Guion had walked with him to the gate and let her hand rest in his. He recalled her words, as he had recalled them a hundred times that day, "*The man I care for.*" He went back over each phase of their conversation, as though it was something he was trying to learn by heart. He remembered her longing for her aunt de Melcourt.

All at once he struck the railing with the energy of a man who has a new inspiration. "By George!" he said, half aloud, "that's an idea—that's certainly an idea! I wonder if. . . The 'Indiana' sailed last week . . . it ought to be the turn of the 'Louisiana' the day after to-morrow. By George, I believe I could make it if. . . "

He hurried back to the bench where Ashley was still sitting. The latter was upright now, his arm stretched along the back. He had lit a cigarette.

Davenant approached to within a few feet. "Look here, Colonel," he said gently, "we've got to forget this evening."

It was a minute or two before Ashley said: "What's the good of forgetting one thing when there are so many others to remember?"

"Perhaps we can forget them, too—one by one. I guess you haven't understood *me*. I dare say I haven't understood you, either, though I think I could if you'd

give me a chance. But all I want to say is this, that I'm—off——"

Ashley turned quickly. "Off? Where?"

"Where we're not likely to meet—for some little time—again."

"Oh, but I say! You can't——"

"Can't what, Colonel?"

"Can't drop—drop out of the running—damn it all, man! you can't—you can't—let it be a walk-over for *me* —after all that's——"

"That's where you've made your mistake, Colonel, I guess. You thought there was—was a—a race, so to speak—and that I was in it. Well, I wasn't."

"But what the deuce——?"

"I not only wasn't in it—but there was *no race*. There never was. It was a walk-over for—for some one—from the start. Now I guess I'll say good-night."

He turned away abruptly, but, having taken a few steps, came back again. "Look here! Let's have a cigarette."

Ashley fumbled for his case, opened it, and held it up. "I say, take two or three."

As Ashley lifted the one he was smoking to serve as a light, Davenant noticed that the hand trembled, and steadied it in the grasp of his own.

"Thanks; and good night again," he said briefly, and strode finally away into the darkness.

XX

IT was not till the motor had actually got out of Havre and was well along the dusty white road to the château that Davenant began to have misgivings. Up to that point the landmarks—and the seamarks—had been familiar. On board the "Louisiana," in London, in Paris, even in Havre, he had felt himself on his accustomed beat. On steamers or trains and in hotels he

had that kind of confidence in himself which, failing him somewhat whenever he entered the precincts of domestic life, was sure to desert him altogether now, as he approached the strange and imposing.

"Madame est à la campagne."

A black-eyed old woman had told him so on the previous day. For the instant he was relieved, since it put off the moment of confronting the great lady a little longer.

He had, in fact, rung the bell at the frowning portal in the rue de l'Université with some trepidation. Suggestions of grandeur and mystery beyond anything he was prepared to meet lay within these seemingly fortified walls. At the same time it gave glory to the glamour in which the image of Olivia Guion always appeared to him to think she had passed and repassed these solemn gates at will, and that the stately Louis Quinze *hotel*, of which the concierge allowed him a glimpse across the courtyard, had, on and off, been her home for years. It was one more detail that removed her beyond his sphere and made her inaccessible to his yearnings.

From the obliging post-office clerk at the bank on which he drew—a gentleman posted in the movements of all distinguished Americans on the Continent of Europe—he learned that "la campagne" for the Marquise de Melcourt meant the château of Melcourt-le-Danois, in the neighbourhood of Harfleur. He was informed, moreover, that by taking the two-o'clock train to Havre he could sleep that night at the Hotel Frascati, and motor out to Melcourt easily within an hour in the morning. It began then to occur to him that what had presented itself at first as a prosaic journey from Boston to Paris and back was becoming an adventure, with a background of castles and noble dames.

Nevertheless, he took heart for the run to Havre, and except for feeling at twilight the wistfulness that comes out of the Norman landscape—the melancholy of things forgotten but not gone, dead but still brooding wraith-

like over the valley of the Seine, haunting the hoary churches, and the turreted ch teaux, and the windings of the river, and the long lines of poplar, and the villages and forests and orchards and corn-fields—except for this, his spirits were good. If now and then he was appalled at what he, a shy fellow with no antecedents to recommend him and no persuasive powers, had undertaken, he thought of Olivia Guion. The thing he was attempting became trivial when compared with the possible benefits to her.

That reflection, too, enabled him to come victoriously out of three long hours of inward wrestling—three long hours spent on the jetty which thrust itself into the sea just outside his hotel at Havre. He supposed he had already fought the battle with himself and won it. Its renewal on the part of powers within his soul took him by surprise.

He had strolled out after dinner to the Chaussée des Etats-Unis to while away the time before going to bed. Ships and sailors, with the lights and sights and sounds of a busy port, had for him the fascination they exert over most men who lead rather sedentary lives. At that time in the evening the Chaussée des Etats-Unis was naturally gay with the landsman's welcome to the sailor on shore. The cafés were crowded inside and out. Singing came from one and the twang of an instrument from another, all along the quay. Soldiers mingled fraternally with sailors, and pretty young women, mostly bareheaded and neatly dressed in black, mingled with both. It was what a fastidious observer of life might call "low," but Davenant's judgments had no severity of that kind. He looked at the merry groups, composed for the most part of chance acquaintances, here to-day and gone to-morrow, swift and light of love, with a curious craving for fellowship. From the gatherings of friends he felt himself invariably the one shut out.

It was this sense of exclusion that finally sent him away from the cheerful quay to wander down the jetty

which marks the line where the Harbour of Grace, with its intricate series of basins and docks, becomes the sea. It was a mild night, though the waves beat noisily enough against the bastions of the pier. At intervals he was swept by a scud of spray. All sorts of acrid odours were in the wind—smells of tar and salt and hemp and smoke and oil—the perfumes of sea-hazard and romance.

Pulling his cap over his brows and the collar of his ulster about his ears, he sat down on the stone coping. His shoulders were hunched; his hands hung between his knees. He did not care to smoke. For a few minutes he was sufficiently occupied in tracing the lines and the groupings of lights. He had been in Havre more than once before, and knew the quai de Londres from the quai de New York, and both from the quai du Chili. Across the mouth of the Seine he could distinguish the misty radiance which must be Trouville from that which must be Honfleur. Directly under his eyes in the Avant Port the dim hulls of steamers and warships, fishing-boats and tugs, lay like monsters asleep.

There was no reason why all this should make him feel outside the warm glow and life of things; but it did. It did worse in that it inspired a longing for what he knew positively to be unattainable. It stirred a new impulse to fight for what he had definitely given up. It raised again questions he thought he had answered and revived hopes he had never had to quench, since from the beginning they were vain.

Were they vain? In taking this form the query became more insidious—more difficult to debate and settle once for all. To every argument there was a perpetually recurring, "Yes, but——" with the memory of the instants when her hand rested in his longer than there was any need for, of certain looks and lights in her eyes, of certain tones and half-tones in her voice. Other men would have made these things a beginning,

whereas he had taken them as the end. He had taken them as the end by a foregone conclusion. They had meant so much to him that he couldn't conceive of asking more, when perhaps they were nothing but the first fruits.

The wind increased in violence; the spray was salt on his moustache, and clung to the nap of his clothing. The radiance that marked Trouville and Honfleur grew dim almost to extinction. Along the quay the cafès began to diminish the number of their lights. The cheerful groups broke up, strolling home to the mansard or to the fo'castle, with bursts of drunken or drowsy song. Davenant continued to sit crouched, huddled, bowed. He ceased to argue, or to follow the conflict between self-interest and duty, or to put up a fight of any kind. He was content to sit still and suffer. In its own way suffering was a relief. It was the first time he had given it a chance since he had brought himself to facing squarely the fact of his useless pointless love. He had always dodged it by finding something to be done, or choked it down by sheer force of will. Now he let it rush in on him, all through him, all over him, flooding his mind and spirit, making his heart swell and his blood surge and his nerves ache and his limbs throb and quiver. If he could have formed a thought it would have been that of the Hebrew Psalmist when he felt himself poured out like water. He had neither shame for his manhood nor alarm for his pride till he heard himself panting, panting raucously, with a sound that was neither a moan nor a sob, but which racked him convulsively, while there was a hot smarting in his eyes.

But in the end he found relief and worked his way out to a sort of victory. That is to say, he came back to see, as he had seen all along, that there was one clear duty to be done. If he loved Olivia Guion with a love that was worthy to win, it must also be with a love that could lose courageously. This was no new dis-

covery. It was only a fact which loneliness and the craving to be something to her, as she was everything to him, had caused him for the moment to lose sight of. But he came back to it with conviction. It was conviction that gave him confidence, that calmed him enabling him, as a clock somewhere struck eleven, to get up, shake the sea-spray from his person, and return to his hotel.

It was while he was going to bed that Rodney Temple's words came back to him, as they did from time to time: "Some call it God."

"I wonder if it is—God?" he questioned.

But the misgiving that beset him as he motored out of Havre in the morning was of another kind. It was that which attaches to the unlikely and the queer. Once having plunged into a country road, away from railways and hotels, he felt himself starting on a wild-goose chase. His assurance waned in proportion as conditions grew stranger. In vain an obliging chauffeur, accustomed to enlighten tourists as to the merits of this highway, pointed out the fact that the dusty road along which they sped had once—and not so many years ago—been the border of the bed of the Seine, that the white cliffs towering above them on the left, and edged along the top with verdure, marked the natural brink of the river, and that the church so admirably placed on a hillside was the shrine of a martyred maiden saint, whose body had come ashore here at Graville, having been flung into the water at Harfleur. Davenant was deaf to these interesting bits of information. He was blind, too. He was blind to the noble sweep of the Seine between soft green hills. He was blind to the craft on its bosom—steamers laden with the produce of orchard and the farm for England; Norwegian brigantines, weird as "The Flying Dutchman" in their black and white paint, carrying ice or lumber to Rouen; fishing-boats with red or umber sails. He was blind to the villages, clambering over cliffs to a casino, a *plage*, and a

Hotel des Bains, or nestling on the uplands round a spire. He was blind to the picturesque wooded gorges, through which little tributaries of the great river had once run violently down from the tableland of the Pays de Caux. He was blind to the charms of Harfleur, famous and somnolent, on the banks of a still more somnolent stream. He resumed the working of his faculties only when the chauffeur turned and said :

" Voilà, monsieur—voilà le château de madame la Marquise."

If it was possible for Davenant's heart to leap and sink in the same instant, it did it then. It leaped at the sight of this white and rose castle with its towers and donjon and keep ; it sank at the thought that he, poor old unpretentious Peter Davenant, with no social or personal passports of any kind, must force his way over drawbridge and beneath portcullis—or whatever else might be the method of entering a feudal pile—into the presence of the châtelaine whose abode here must be that of some legendary princess, and bend her to his will. Stray memories came to him of Siegfrieds and Prince Charmings, with a natural gift for this sort of thing. but only to make his own appearance in the rôle the more absurd.

Melcourt-le-Danois had that characteristic which goes with all fine and fitting architecture of springing naturally out of the soil. It seemed as if it must always have been there. It was as difficult to imagine the plateau on which it stood without it as to see Mont-Saint-Michel merely as a rocky islet. The plateau crowned a white bluff running out like the prow of a Viking ship into a bend of the Seine, commanding the river in both directions. It was clear at a glance that when Roger the Dane laid here the first stone of his pirates' stronghold, to protect his port of Harfleur, the salt water must have dashed right up against the chalky cliff, but the centuries during which the silt of the Vosges had been carried down the river and piled up

against the rocks at its mouth had driven the castle inland for an eighth of a mile. Melcourt-le-Danois, which had once looked down into the very waves, now dominated in the first place a strip of gardens, and orchards of small fruit, through which the road from Harfleur to the village of Melcourt, half a mile farther up the Seine, ran like a bit of white braid.

Viewed from the summit of the cliff on which Davenant's motor had stopped, the château was composed of two ancient towers guarding the long, and relatively low, relatively modern, brick mansion of the epoch of Louis-Treize. The brick, once red, had toned down now to a soft old rose ; the towers, once white, were splashed above the line to which the ivy climbed with rose and orange. Over the tip of the bluff and down its side of southern exposure, towards the village of Melcourt, ran a park of oak and chestnut, in all the October hues of yellow and olive brown.

But ten minutes later, when the motor had made a detour round cliffs and little inlets and arrived at the main entrance to the château, Davenant found the aspect of things less intimidating. Through a high wrought-iron grille, surmounted by the head of an armorial beast, he had the view of a Lenôtre garden all scrolls and arabesques. The towers, which at a distance had seemed part of a continuous whole, now detached themselves. The actual residence was no more imposing than any good-sized house in America. Davenant understood the chauffeur to say that " Madame la Marquise l'avait modernisé jusqu'au bout des ongles."

Having summoned up courage to ring the bell, he found it answered by a middle-aged woman with a face worn by time and weather to the polished grooves and creases to which water wears a rock.

" On ne visite pas le château."

She made the statement with the stony, impersonal air of one who has to say the same thing a good many times a year. Davenant pressed close to the grille,

murmuring something of which she caught the word "Madame."

"Madame la Marquise n'est pas visible."

The quick Norman eye had, however, noticed the movement of Davenant's hand, detecting there something more than a card. In speaking she edged nearer the grille. Thrusting his fingers between the curves of the iron arabesques, he said, in his best French, "Prenez."

Measuring time by the pounding of his heart rather than the ticking of his watch, it seemed to him he had a long time to wait before the woman reappeared, handing him back his card through the openwork of the grille, saying briefly, "Madame la Marquise ne recoit pas." Perhaps it was the crestfallen look in the blond giant's face that tempted her to add, "Je le regrette, monsieur."

In the compassionate tone he read a hint that all was not lost. Scribbling under his name the words, "Boston, Mass. Very urgent," he once more passed the card through the grille, accompanied by the manual act that had won the woman's sympathy in the first place.

"*Allez*, please," he said earnestly, "and—*vite*."

He found his pencilled words effective, for presently the woman came back. "Venez, monsieur," she said, as she unlocked the grille with a large key carried beneath her apron. Her stony official manner had returned.

As he drew near the house a young man sketching or writing under a yew-tree looked up curiously. A few steps farther on a pretty girl, in a Leghorn hat, clipping roses into a basket, glanced at him with shy, startled eyes. In the hall, where he was left standing, a young officer in sky-blue tunic and red breeches, who had been strumming at a piano in an adjoining room, strolled to the door and stared at him. A thin, black-eyed, sharp-visaged, middle-aged lady, dressed in black and wearing a knitted shawl—perhaps the mother of the three young people he had just seen—came half-way down the strip

of red carpet on the stairs, inspected him, and went up again. It was all more disconcerting than he had expected.

The great hall, of which the chief beauty was in the magnificent sweep of the monumental stairway, with its elaborate wrought-iron balustrade, struck him as a forbidding entry to a home. A man-servant came at last to deliver him from the soft, wondering eyes of the young officer, and lead him into a room which he had already recognised as a library through the half-open door.

Here he had just time to get a blurred impression of portraits, busts, buhl surfaces, and rich or ancient bindings—with views through the long windows of the traffic on the Seine—when a little old lady appeared in a doorway at the farther end of the room. He knew she was a little old lady from all sorts of indefinable evidence, in spite of her own efforts to be young. He knew it in spite of fluffy golden hair and a filmy, youthful morning robe that displayed the daintiness of her figure as well as the expensiveness of her taste.

She tripped rapidly down the long room, with quick little steps and a quick little swinging of the arms that made the loose gossamer sleeves blow outward from the wrists. He recognized her instantly as the Marquise de Melcourt from her resemblance, in all those outlines which *poudre de riz* and cherry paste could not destroy, to the Guion type. The face would have still possessed the Guion beauty, had she given it a chance. Looking as it as she came nearer, Davenant was reminded of things he had read of those Mongolian tribes who are said to put on masks to hide their fear and go resolutely forth to battle. Having always considered this a lofty form of courage, he was inconsistent in finding its reflection here—the feat of time beneath these painted cheeks and fluffy locks, and the fight against it carried on by the Marquise's whole brave bearing—rather pitifully comic.

Madame herself had no such feeling. She wore her

mask with absolute nonchalance, beginning to speak while still some yards away.

"Eh, bien, monsieur?"

Davenant doubled himself up into a deep bow, but before he had time to stammer out some apologetic self-introduction, she continued—

"You've come from Davis and Stern, I suppose, on business. I always tell them not to send me people, but to cable. Why didn't they cable? They know I don't like Americans coming here. I'm pestered to death with them—that is, I used to be—and I should be still, if I didn't put 'em down."

The voice was high and chattering, with a tendency to crack. It had the American quality with a French intonation. In speaking, the Marquise made little nervous dashes, now to the right, now to the left, as though endeavouring to get by some one who blocked her way.

"I haven't come on business, my—my lady."

He used this term of respect partly from a frightened desire to propitiate a great personage and partly because he couldn't think of any other.

"Then what *have* you come on? If it's to see the château you may as well go away. It's never shown. Those are positive orders. I make no exceptions. They must have told you so at the gate. But you Americans will dare anything. Mon Dieu, quel tas de barbares!"

The gesture of her hands in uttering the exclamation was altogether French, but she betrayed her oneness with the people she reviled by saying: "Quel tah de bah-bah!"

"I haven't come to see the château either, my lady——"

"You can call me madame," she interrupted, not without a kindlier inflection on the hint.

He began again. "I haven't come to see the château, either—madame. I've come to see *you*."

She made one of her little plunges. "Oh, indeed! *Have* you? I thought you'd learned better than that—over there. You used to come in ship-loads, but——"

He began to feel more sure of himself. "When I say I came to see you, madame, I mean, I came to—to tell you something."

"Then, so long as it's not on business, I don't want to hear it. I suppose you're one of Walter Davenant's boys? I don't consider him any relation to me at all. It's too distant. If I acknowledged all the cousins forced on me from over there I might as well include Abraham and Adam. Are you the first or the second wife's son?"

He explained his connection with the Davenant name. "But that isn't what I came to talk about, madame—not about myself. I wanted to tell you of—of your nephew—Mr. Henry Guion."

She turned with a movement like that of a fleeing nymph, her hand stretched behind her. "Don't. I don't want to hear about him. Nor about my niece. They're strangers to me. I don't know them."

"You'd like to know them now, madame—because they're in great trouble."

She took refuge behind a big English arm-chair, leaning on the back.

"I dare say. It's what they were likely to come to. I told my niece so, the last time she allowed me the privilege of her conversation. But I told her, too, that in the day of her calamity she wasn't to look to me."

"She isn't looking to you, madame. I am. I'm looking to you because I imagine you can help her. There's no one else— "

"And has she sent you as her messenger? Why can't she come herself, if it's so bad as all that—or write? I thought she was married—to some Englishman."

"They're not married yet, madame; and unless you help her I don't see how they're going to be—the way things stand."

"Unless I help her! My good fellow, you don't know what you're saying. Do you know that she refused—refused violently—to help *me?*"

He shook his head, his blue eyes betraying some incredulity.

"Well, then, I'll tell you. It'll show you. You'll be able to go away again with a clear conscience, knowing you've done your best and failed. Sit down."

As she showed no intention of taking a seat herself, he remained standing.

"She refused the Duc de Berteuil." She made the statement with head erect and hands flung apart. "I suppose you have no idea of what that meant to me?"

"I'm afraid I haven't."

"Of course you haven't. I don't know an American who *would* have. You're so engrossed in your own small concerns. None of you have any conception of the things that really matter—the higher things. Well, then, let me tell you. The Duc de Berteuil is—or rather *was*—the greatest *parti* in France. He isn't any more, because they've married him to a rich girl from South America or one of those places—brown as a berry—with a bust —" She rounded her arms to give an idea of the bust. "Mais, n'importe. My niece refused him. That meant—I've never confessed it to anyone before—I've been too proud—but I want you to understand—it meant my defeat—my final defeat. I hadn't the courage to begin again. C'était le désastre. C'était Sedan."

"Oh, madame!"

It seemed to him that her mouth worked with an odd piteousness; and before going on she put up a crooked little jewelled hand and dashed away a tear.

"It would have been everything to me. It would have put me where I belong, in the place I've been trying to reach all these years. The life of an American woman in Europe, monsieur, can be very cruel. We've nothing to back us up, and everything to fight against in front.

It's all push, and little headway. They don't want u
That's the plain English of it. They can't imagine wh
we leave our own country and come over here. They'
so narrow. They're selfish too. Everything they'v
got they want to keep for themselves. They marry us-
the Lord only knows why!—and nine times out of ten a
we get for it is the knowledge that we've been ban
boozled out of our own *dots*. There was René de Lo
chartres who married that goose Annie Armstron
They ridiculed her when she came over here, and at th
same time clapped him on the back for having got he
That's as true as you live. It's their way. They woul
have ridiculed me, too, if I hadn't been determine
years ago to beat them on their own ground. I coul
have done it, too, if——"

"If it had been worth while," he ventured.

"You know nothing about it. I could have done
if my niece had put out just one little finger—when I'
got everything ready for her to do it. Yes, I'd g
everything ready—and yet she refused him. Sh
refused him after I'd seen them all—his mother, h
sisters, his two uncles—one of them in waiting on th
Duc d'Orléans—Philippe V., as we call him—all of the
the purest old noblesse d'epée in Normandy."

Her agitation expressed itself again in little dartin
to and fro. "I went begging to them, as you might sa
I took all their snubs—and oh! so fine some of the
were!—more delicate than the point of a needle!
took them because I could see just how I should p
them back. I needn't explain to you how that wou
be, because you couldn't understand. It would be o
of the question for an American."

"I don't think we *are* good at returning snub
madame. That's a fact."

"You're not good at anything but making money
and you make that blatantly, as if you were the fir
people in the world to do it. Why, France and Englan
could buy and sell you, and most of you don't know i

Mais, n'importe. I went begging to them, as I've told ;ou. At first they wouldn't hear of her at any price—lidn't want an American. That was bluff, to get a bigger *lot*. I had counted on it in advance. I knew well nough that they'd take a Hottentot if there was money nough. For the matter of that, Hottentot and American re much the same to them. But I made it bluff for bluff.)h, I'm sharp. I manage all my own affairs in America —with advice. I've speculated a little in your markets uite successfully. I know how I stand to within a ew thousand dollars of your money. I offered half a illion of francs. They laughed at it. I knew they ;ould, but it's as much as they'd get with a French girl. went to a million—to a million and a half—to two illions. At two millions—that would be—let me see —five into twenty makes four—about four hundred housand dollars of your money—they gave in. Yes, ney gave in. I expected them to hold out for it, and ney did. But at that figure they made all the con-essions and gave in."

"And did he give in?" Davenant asked with naïve uriosity.

"Oh, I'd made sure of him beforehand. He and I nderstood each other perfectly. He would have let it o at a million and a half. He was next door to being t love with her besides. All he wanted was to be well stablished, poor boy! But I meant to go up to two illions, anyhow. I could afford it."

"Four hundred thousand dollars," Davenant said, ith an idea that he might convey a hint to her, "would e practically the sum——"

"I could afford it," she went on, "because of those diculous copper-mines—the Hamlet and Tecla. I asn't rich before that. My *dot* was small. No Guion ever heard of was able to save money. My father was o exception."

"You are in the Hamlet and Tecla!" Davenant's ue eyes were wide open. He was on his own ground.

The history of the Hamlet and Tecla mines had been in his own lifetime a fairy-tale come true.

Madame de Melcourt nodded proudly. "My father had bought nearly two thousand shares when they were down to next to nothing. They came to me when he died. It was mere wastepaper for years and years. Then all of a sudden—pouff!—they began to go up and up—and I sold them when they were near a thousand. I could have afforded the two millions of francs—and I promised to settle Melcourt-le-Danois on them into the bargain, when I—if I ever should—— But my niece wouldn't take him—simply—would—not. Ah," she cried, in a strangled voice, "c'était trop fort!"

"But did she know you were—what shall I say?—negotiating?"

"She was in that stupid England. It wasn't a thing I could write to her about. I meant it as a surprise. When all was settled I sent for her—and told her. Oh, monsieur, vous n'avez pas d'idée! Quelle scène! Quelle scène! J'ai failli en mourir." She wrung her clasped hands at the recollection. "That girl has an anger like a storm. Avec tous ses airs de reine et de sainte—she was terrible. Never shall I forget it—jamais! jam-ais! au grand jamais! Et puis," she added, with a fatalistic toss of her hands, "c'était fini. It was all over. Since then—nothing!"

She made a little dash as if to leave him, returning to utter what seemed like an afterthought. "It would have made her. It would have made *me*. We could have dictated to the Faubourg. We could have humiliated them—like that." She stamped her foot. "It would have been a great alliance—what I've been so much in need of. The Melcourt—well, they're all very well—old noblesse de la Normandie, and all that—but poor!—mais pauvres!—and as provincial as a curé de campagne. When I married my poor husband—but we won't go into that—I've been a widow since I was so high—ever since 1870—with my own way to make. If

ıy niece hadn't deserted me I could have made it. Jow all that is past—fini-ni-ni! The clan Berteuil has et the Faubourg against me. They've the power, too. t's all so intricate, so silent, such wheels within wheels -but it's done. They've never wanted me. They on't want any of us—not for ourselves. It's the sou! i-the sou!—the everlasting sou! Noble or peasant—: makes no difference. But if my niece hadn't aban-oned me——"

"Why shouldn't you come home, madame?" Davenant suggested, touched by so much that was ragic. "You wouldn't find anyone after the sou there."

"They're all about me," she whispered—"the Mel-ourt. They're all over the house. They come and ettle on me, and I can't shake them off. They suffo-ate me—waiting for the moment when—— But I've ıade my will, and some'll be disappointed. Oh, I ıall leave them Melcourt-le-Danois. It's mine. I ought it with my own money, after my husband's eath, and restored it when the Hamlet and Tecla paid o well. It shall not go out of their family—for my usband's sake. But," she added fiercely, "neither ıall the money go out of mine. They shall know I ave a family. It's the only way by which I can force ıe knowledge on them. They think I sprang out of ıe earth like a mushroom. You may tell my niece as ıuch as that—and let her get all the comfort from it ıe can. That's all I have to say, monsieur. Good ıorning."

The dash she made from him seeming no more final ıan those which had preceded it, he went on speaking: "I'm afraid, madame, that help is too far in the future o be of much assistance now. Besides, I'm not sure it's hat they want. We've managed to keep Mr. Henry uion out of prison. That danger is over. Our present oncern is for Miss Olivia Guion's happiness."

As he expected, the shock calmed her. Notwith-anding her mask, she grew suddenly haggard, though

her eyes, which—since she had never been able to put *poudre de riz* or cherry paste in them—were almost as fine as ever, instantly flashed out the signal of the Guion pride. Her fluffy head went up, and her little figure stiffened as she entrenched herself again behind the arm-chair. Her only hint of flinching came from a slackening in the flow of speech and a higher, thinner quality on the voice.

"Has my nephew, Henry Guion, been doing things—that—that would send him—to prison?"

In spite of herself the final words came out with a gasp.

"It's a long story, madame—or, at least, a complicated one. I could explain it, if you'd give me the time."

"Sit down."

They took seats at last. Owing to the old lady's possession of what she herself called a business mind he found the tale easy in the telling. Her wits being quick and her questions pertinent, she was soon in command of the facts. She was soon, too, in command of herself. The first shock having passed, she was able to go into complete explanations with courage.

"So that," he concluded, "now that Mr. Guion is safe, if Miss Guion could only marry—the man—the man she cares for—everything would be put as nearly right as we can make it."

"And at present they are at a deadlock. She won't marry him if he has to sell his property, and so forth; and he can't marry her and live in debt to you. Is that it?"

"That's it, madame, exactly. You've put it in a nutshell."

She looked at him hardly. "And what has it all got to do with me?"

He looked at her steadily in his turn. "I thought perhaps you wouldn't care to live in debt to me, either."

She was startled. "Who? I? En voilà une idée!"

"I thought," he went on, "that possibly the Guion sense of family honour——"

"Fiddle-faddle! There's no sense of family honour among Americans. There can't be. You can only have family honour where, as with us, the family is the unit; whereas, with you, the unit is the individual. The American individual may have a sense of honour; but the American family is only a disintegrated mush. What you really thought was that you might get your money back."

"If you like, madame. That's another way of putting it. If the family paid me, Miss Guion would feel quite differently—and so would Colonel Ashley."

"When you say the family," she sniffed, "you mean me."

"In the sense that I naturally think first of its most distinguished member. And, of course, the greater the distinction the greater must be—shall I call it the indignity?—of living under an obligation——"

"Am I to understand that you put up this money—that's your American term, isn't it?—that you put up this money in the expectation that I would pay you back?"

"Not exactly. I put up the money, in the first place, to save the credit of the Guion name, and with the intention, if you didn't pay me back, to do without it."

"And you risked being considered over-officious."

"There wasn't much risk about that," he smiled. "They did think me so—and do."

"And you got every one into a fix."

"Into a fix, but out of prison."

"H'm!"

She grew restless, uncomfortable, fidgeting with her rings and bracelets.

"And pray, what sort of a person is this Englishman to whom my niece has got herself engaged?"

"One of their very finest," he said promptly. "As

a soldier, so they say, he'll catch up one day with me like Roberts and Kitchener; and as for his privat character—well, you can judge of it from the fact tha he wants to strip himself of all he has so that the Guio name shall owe nothing to anyone outside——"

"Then he's a fool."

"From that point of view—yes. There *are* foo of that sort, madame. But there's something mo to him."

He found himself reciting glibly Ashley's claims a a suitor in the way of family, position, and fortune.

"So that it would be what some people might ca a good match."

"The best sort of match. It's the kind of thing she made for—that she'd be happy in—regiments, and un forms, and glory, and presenting prizes, and all that.

"H'm! I shall have nothing to do with it." She ros with dignity. "If my niece had only held out a litt finger——"

"It was a case, madame," he argued, rising too—" was a case in which she couldn't hold out a little fing without offering her whole hand."

"You know nothing about it. I'm wrong to discus it with you at all. I'm sure I don't know why I d except that——"

"Except that I'm an American," he suggested—" or of your own."

"One of my own! Quelle idée! Do you like him this Englishman?"

He hedged. "Miss Guion likes him."

"But you don't."

"I haven't said so. I might like him well enoug if——"

"If you got your money back."

He smiled and nodded.

"Is she in love with him?"

"Oh—deep!"

"How do *you* know? Has she told you so?"

"Y-es; I think I may say—she has."

"Did you ask her."

He coloured. "I had to—about something."

"You weren't proposing to her yourself, were you?"

He tried to take this humorously. "Oh no, madame——"

"You can't be in love with her, or you wouldn't be trying so hard to marry her to someone else—not unless you're a bigger fool than you look."

"I hope I'm not that," he laughed.

"Well, I shall have nothing to do with it—nothing. Between my niece and me—tout est fine." She darted from him, swerving again like a bird on the wing. "I don't know you. You come here with what may be no more than a cock-and-bull story, to get inside the château."

"I shouldn't expect you to do anything, madame, without verifying all I've told you. For the matter of that, it'll be easy enough. You've only to write to your men of business, or—which would be better still—take a trip to America for yourself."

She threw out her arms with a tragic gesture. "My good man, I haven't been in America for forty years. I nearly died of it then. What it must be like now——"

"It wouldn't be so fine as this, madame, nor so picturesque. But it would be full of people who'd be kind of you, not for the sou—but for yourself."

She did her best to be offended. "You're taking liberties, monsieur. C'est bien américan cela."

"Excuse me, madame," he said humbly. "I only mean that they *are* fond of you—at least, I know Miss Union is. Two nights before I sailed I heard her almost crying for you—yes, almost crying. That's why I came. I thought I'd come and tell you. I should think it might mean something to you—over here so long—all alone—to have some one like that—such a—such a wonderful young lady wanting you—in her trouble——"

"And such a wonderful young man wanting his money back. Oh, I'm not blind, monsieur. I see a great deal more than you think. I see through and through you. You fancy you're throwing dust in my eyes, and you haven't thrown a grain. Pouff! Oh, là là! Mais, c'est fini. As for my niece—le bon Dieu l'a bien punie. For me to step in now would be to interfere with the chastisement of Providence. Le bon Dieu is always right. I'll say that for Him. Good morning." She touched a bell. "The man will show you to the door. If you like to stroll about the grounds—now that you've got in—well, you can."

With sleeves blowing, she sped down the room as if on pinions. The man-servant waited respectfully. Davenant stood his ground, hoping for some sign of her relenting. It was almost over her shoulder that she called back:

"Where are you staying?"

He told her.

"Stupid place. You'll find the Chariot d'Or at Melcourt a great deal nicer. Simple, but clean. An old chef of mine keeps it. Tell him I sent you. And ask for his poularde au riz."

XXI

"WHAT do you think of him?" Ashley's tone indicated some uncertainty as to what he thought himself. Indeed, uncertainty was indicated elsewhere than in his tone. It seemed to hang about him, to look from his eyes, to take form in his person. Perhaps this was the one change wrought in him by a month's residence in America. When he arrived everything had bespoken him a man aggressively positive, with the habit of being sure. His very attitude now, as he sat in Rodney Temple's office, in the Harvard Gallery of Fine Arts, his hands thrust into his pockets, his legs stretched apart, his hat on the back of his head

suggested one who feels the foundations of the earth to have shifted.

Rodney Temple, making his arrangements for leaving for the day, met one question with another. "What do *you*?"

"You know him," Ashley urged, "and I don't."

"I thought you did. I thought you'd read him right off—as a cow-puncher."

"He looks like one, by Jove! and he speaks like one, too. You wouldn't call him a gentleman? What?"

"If you mean by a gentleman one who's always been able to take the best in the world for granted, perhaps he isn't. But that isn't our test—over here."

"Then, what is?"

"I'm not sure that I could tell you so that you'd understand—at any rate, not unless you start out with the fact that the English gentleman and the American differ not only in species, but in genus. I'd go so far as to say that they've got to be recognized by different sets of faculties. You get at your man by the eye and the ear; we have to use a subtler apparatus. If we didn't we should let a good many go uncounted. Some of our finest are even more uncouth with their consonants than good friend Davenant. They'd drop right out of your list, but they take a high place in ours. To try to discern one by the methods created for the other is like what George Eliot says of putting on spectacles to detect odours. Ignorance of this basic social fact on both sides has given rise to much international misjudgment. See?"

"Can't say that I do."

"No, you wouldn't. But until you do you won't understand a big simple type——"

"I don't care a hang about his big simple type. What I want to know is how to take him. Is he a confounded sentimentalist?—or is he still putting up a bluff?"

"What difference does it make to you?"

"If he's putting up a bluff, he's waiting out there at Michigan for me to call it. If he's working the sentimental racket, then I've got to be the beneficiary of his beastly good-will."

"If he's putting up a bluff, you can fix him by not calling it at all; and as for his beastly good-will, well he's a beneficiary of it, too."

"How so?"

"Because beastly good-will is a thing that cuts both ways. He'll get as much out of it as you."

"That's all very fine——"

"It's very fine, indeed, for him. We've an old saying in these parts: By the Street called Straight we come to the House called Beautiful. It's one of those fanciful saws of which the only justification is that it works. Any one can test the truth of it by taking the highway. Well, friend Davenant is taking it. He'll reach the House called Beautiful as straight as a die. Don't you fret about that. You'll owe him nothing in the long run, because he'll get all the reward he's entitled to. When's the wedding? Fixed the date yet?"

"Not going to fix one," Ashley explained moodily. "One of these days, when everything is settled at Tory Hill and the sale is over, we shall walk off to the church and get married. That seems to be the best way, as matters stand."

"It's a very sensible way at all times. And I hear you're carrying Henry off with you to England."

Ashley shrugged his shoulders. "Going the whole hog. What? Had to make the offer. Olivia couldn't leave him behind. Anything that will make her happy——"

"Will make you happy."

"That's about the size of it."

Having locked the last drawer and put out the desk light, Temple led his guest down the long gallery and across the Yard to the house on Charlesbank. Here Ashley pursued kindred themes in the company of Mrs.

Fane, finding himself alone with her at tea. He was often alone with her at tea, her father having no taste for this form of refreshment, while her mother found reasons for being absent.

"Queer old cove, your governor," Ashley observed, stretching himself comfortably before the fire. The blaze of logs alone lit up the room.

"Is that why you seem to have taken a fancy to him?"

"I like to hear him gassing. Little bit like the Bible, don't you know."

"He's very fond of the Bible."

"Seems to think a lot of that chap—your governor."

A nod supposed to indicate the direction of the State of Michigan enabled her to follow his line of thought.

"He does. There's something rather colossal about the way he's dropped out——"

"A jolly sight too colossal. Makes him more important than if he'd stayed on the spot and fought the thing to a finish."

"Fought what thing to a finish?"

He was sorry to have used the expression. "Oh, there's still a jolly lot to settle up, you know."

"But I thought everything was arranged—that you'd accepted the situation."

He stretched himself more comfortably before the fire. "We'd a row," he said suddenly.

"A row? What kind of a row?"

"A street row—just like two hooligans. He struck me."

"Rupert!" She half sprang up. "He——"

Ashley swung round in his chair. He was smiling.

"Oh, I *beg* your pardon," she cried, in confusion. "I can't think what made me call you that. I never *do*—never. It was the surprise—and the shock——"

"That's all right," he assured her. "I often call you Drusilla when I'm talking to Olivia. I don't see why we shouldn't—we've always been such pals—and we're going to be a kind of cousins——"

"Tell me about Peter."

"Oh, there's nothing much that stands telling. We were two idiots—two silly asses. I insulted him—and he struck out. I called him a cad—I believe I called him a damned cad."

"To his *face?*"

"To his *nose.*"

"Oh, you shouldn't have done that."

"And he got mad, by Jove! Oh, it didn't last. We pulled off in a second or two. We saw we were two idiots—two kids. It wasn't worth getting on one's high horse about—or attempting to follow it up—it was too beastly silly for heroics—except that—that he——"

"Except that he—what?"

"Except that he—got the better of me. He has the better of me still. And I can't allow that, by Jove! Do you see?"

"I don't see very clearly. In what way did he get the better of you?"

"In the whole thing—the way he carried it off—the whole silly business."

"Then I don't see what's to be done about it *now.*"

"Something's got to be done, by Jove! I can't let it go at that."

"Well, what do you propose?"

"I don't propose anything. But I can't go through life letting that fellow stay on top. Why, considering everything—all he's done for Olivia and her father—and now this other thing—and his beastly magnanimity besides—he's frightfully on top. It won't do, you know. But I say, you'll not tell Olivia, will you? She'd hate it—about the row, I mean. I don't mind your knowing. You're always such a good pal to me——"

It was impossible to go on, because Mrs. Temple bustled in from the task of helping Olivia with the packing and sacking at Tory Hill. Having greeted Ashley with the unceremoniousness permissible with one who was becoming an intimate figure at the fireside, she settled to her tea.

"Oh, so sad!" she reflected, her little pursed-up mouth twitching nervously. "The dear old house all dismantled! Everything to go! I've asked Henry to come and stay here. It's too uncomfortable for him, with all the moving and packing going on around him. It'll be easier for dear Olivia, too. So hard for her to take care of him, with all the other things she has on her hands. There's Peter's room. Henry may as well have it. I don't suppose we shall see anything more of Peter for ages to come. But I do wish he'd write. Don't you, Colonel Ashley? I've written to him three times now—and not a line from him! I suppose they must be able to get letters out there, at Stoughton, Michigan. It can't be so far beyond civilization as all that. And Olivia would like it. She's worried about him—about his not writing—and everything. Don't you think, Colonel Ashley?"

Ashley looked blank. "I haven't noticed it——"

"Oh, I have. A woman's eye sees those little things, don't you think? Men have so much on their hands—the great things of the world—but the little things, they often count, don't you think? But I tell dear Olivia not to worry. Everything will come right. Things do come right—very often. I'm more pessimistic than Rodney—that I must say. But still I think things have a way of coming right when we least expect it. I tell dear Olivia that Peter will send a line just when we're not looking for it. It's the watched pot that never boils, you know, and so I tell her to stop watching for the postman. That's fatal to getting a letter—watching for the postman. How snug you two look here together! Well, I'll run up and take off my things. No; no more tea, dear. I won't say good-bye, Colonel Ashley, because you'll be here when I come down."

Mrs. Temple was a good woman who would have been astonished to hear herself accused of falsehood, but, as a matter of fact, her account of the conversation with

Olivia bore little relation to the conversation itself. What she had actually said was :

" Poor Peter ! I suppose he doesn't write because he's trying to forget."

The challenge here being so direct, Olivia felt her duty to take it up. The ladies were engaged in sorting the linen in preparation for the sale.

" Forget what ? "

" Forget Drusilla, I suppose. Hasn't it struck you—how much he was in love with her ? "

Olivia held a table-cloth carefully to the light. " Is this Irish linen or German ? I know mamma did get some at Dresden——"

Mrs. Temple pointed out the characteristics of the Belfast weave and pressed her question. " Haven't you noticed it—about Peter ? "

Olivia tried to keep her voice steady as she said : " I've no doubt I should have seen it if I hadn't been so preoccupied."

" Some people think—Rodney, for instance—that he'd lost his head about you, dear ; but we mothers have an insight——"

" Of course ! There seems to be one missing from the dozen of this pattern."

" Oh, it'll turn up. It's probably in the pile over there. I thought I'd speak about it, dear," she went on, " because it must be a relief to you not to have that complication. Things are so complicated already, don't you think ? But if you haven't Peter on your mind, why, that's one thing the less to worry about. If you thought he was in love with you, dear—in your situation—going to be married to some one else—— But you needn't be afraid of that at all. I never saw a young man more in love with anyone than he is with Drusilla—and I think she must have refused him. If she hadn't he would never have shot off in that way, like a bolt from the blue—— But what's the matter, dear ? You look white. You're not ill ? "

"It's the smell of lavender," Olivia gasped weakly. "I never could endure it. I'll just run into the air a minute——"

This was all that passed between Olivia and Mrs. Temple on the subject. If the latter reported it with suppressions and amplifications it was doubtless due to her knowledge of what could be omitted as well as of what would have been said had the topic been pursued. In any case it caused her to sigh and mumble as she went on with her task of folding and unfolding and of examining textures and designs:

"Oh, how mixy! Such sixes and sevens! Everything the wrong way round! My poor Drusilla!—my poor little girlie! And such a good position! Just what she's capable of filling!—as well as Olivia—better, with all her experience of their army. 'Tis better to have loved and lost,' dear Tennyson says; but I don't know. Besides, she's done that already—with poor Gerald—and now, to have to face it all a second time—my poor little girlie!"

As for Olivia, she felt an overpowering desire to flee away. Speeding through the house, where workmen were nailing up cases or sacking rugs, she felt that she *was* fleeing—fleeing anywhere—anywhere—to hide herself. As a matter of fact, the flight was inward, for there was nowhere to go but to her room. Her way was down the short staircase from the attic and along a hall; but it seemed to her that she lived through a succession of emotional stages in the two or three minutes it took to cover it. Her first wild cry "It isn't true! It isn't true!" was followed by the question "Why shouldn't it be true?" to end with her asking herself: "What difference does it make to me?"

"What difference *can* it make to me?"

She had reached that form of the query by the time she took up her station at the window of her room, to stare blankly at the November landscape. She saw herself face to face now with the question which, during

the past month, ever since Davenant's sudden disappearance, she had used all her resources to evade. That it would one day force itself upon her she knew well enough; but she hoped, too, that before there was time for that she would have pronounced her marriage vows, and so burned her bridges behind her. Amid the requirements of duty, which seemed to shift from week to week, the one thing stable was the necessity on her part to keep her promise to the man who had stood by her so nobly. If once it had seemed to her that Davenant's demands—whatever they might prove to be—would override all others, it was now quite cleathatr Ashley's claim on her stood first of all. He ha beend so loyal, so true, so indifferent to his own interests! Besides, he loved her. It was now quite another love than that of the romantic knight who had wooed a gracious lady in the little house at Southsea. That tapestry-tale had ended on the day of his arrival at Tory Hill. In its place there had risen the tested devotion of a man for a woman in great trouble, compelled to deal with the most sordid things in life. He had refused to be spared any of the details she would have saved him from or to turn away from any of the problems she was obliged to face. His very revolt against it, that repugnance to the necessity for doing it which he was not at all times able to conceal, made his self-command in bringing himself to it the more worthy of her esteem. He had the defects of his qualities and the prejudices of his class and profession; but over and above these pardonable failings he had the marks of a hero. And now there was this thing!

She had descried it from afar. She had had a suspicion of it before Davenant went away. It had not created a fear; it was too strange and improbable for that; but it had brought with it a sense of wonder. She remembered the first time she had felt it, this sense of wonder, this sense of something enchanted, outside life and the earth's atmosphere. It was at that moment

on the lawn when, after the unsuccessful meeting between Ashley and Davenant, she had turned with the latter to go into the house. That there was a protective, intimate element in her feeling she had known on the instant; but what she had not known on the instant, but was perfectly aware of now, was that her whole subconscious being had been crying out even then: 'My own! My own!"

With the exaggeration of this thought she was able to get herself in hand. She was able to debate so absurd a suggestion, to argue it down, and turn it into ridicule. But she yielded again as the Voice that talked with her urged the plea: "I didn't say you knew it consciously. You couldn't cry 'My own! My own!' to a man whom up to that point you had treated with disdain. But your subliminal being had begun to know him, to recognize him as——"

To elude this fancy she set herself to recapitulating his weak points. She could see why Ashley should thrust him aside as being "not a gentleman." He fell short, in two or three points, of the English standard. That he had little experience of life as it is lived, of its balance and proportion and perspective, was clear from the way in which he had flung himself and his money into the midst of the Guion disasters. No man of the world could possibly have done that. The very fact of his doing it made him lawfully a subject for some of the epithets Ashley applied to him. Almost anyone would apply them who wanted to take him from a hostile point of view.

She forgot herself so far as to smile faintly. It was just the sort of deficiency which she had it in her power to make up. The reflection set her to dreaming when she wanted to be doing something else. She could have brought him the dower of all the things he didn't know, while he could give her. . . But she caught herself again.

"What kind of a woman am I?"

She began to be afraid. She began to see in herself the type she most detested—the woman who could deliberately marry a man and not be loyal to him. She was on the threshold of marriage with Ashley, and she was thinking of the marvel of life with some one else. When one of the inner Voices denied this charge, another pressed it home by nailing the precise incident on which her heart had been dwelling. "You were thinking of this—of that—of the time on the stairs when, with his face close to yours, he asked you if you loved the man you'd be going away with—of the evening at the gate when your hand was in his and it was so hard to take it away. He has no position to offer you. There's nothing remarkable about him beyond a capacity for making money. He's beneath you from every point of view except that of his mere manhood, and yet you feel that you could let yourself slip into that—into the strength and peace of it——"

She caught herself again—impatiently. It was no use! There was something wilful within her, something that could be called by even a stronger name, that worked back to the point from which she tried to flee, whatever means she took to get away from it.

She returned to her work, persuading Cousin Cherry to go home to tea and leave her to finish the task alone. Even while she did so one of the inner Voices taunted her by saying: "That'll leave you all the more free to dream of—*him.*"

Some days passed before she felt equal to talking about Davenant again. This time it was to the tinkling of silver, as she and Drusilla Fane sorted spoons and forks at the sideboard in the dismantled dining-room. Olivia was moved to speak in the desperate hope that one stab from Drusilla—who might be in a position to deliver it—would free her from the obsession haunting her.

There had been a long silence, sufficiently occupied, it seemed, in laying out the different sorts and sizes

of spoons in rows of a dozen, while Mrs. Fane did the same with the forks.

"Drusilla, did Mr. Davenant ever say anything to you about me?"

She was vexed with herself for the form of her question. It was not Davenant's feeling toward *her*, but toward Drusilla, that she wanted to know. She was drawing the fire in the wrong place. Mrs. Fane counted her dozen forks to the end before saying:

"Why, yes. We've spoken of you."

Having begun with a mistake, Olivia went on with it.

"Did he say—anything in particular?"

"He said a good many things, on and off."

"Some of which might have been—in particular?"

"All of them, if it comes to that."

"Why did you never tell me?"

"For one reason, because you never asked me"

"Have you any idea why I'm asking you now?"

"Not the faintest. I dare say we shan't see anything more of him for years to come."

"Did you—did you—refuse him? Did you send him away?"

"Well, that's one thing I didn't have to do, thank the Lord. There was no necessity. I was afraid at one time that mother might make him propose to me—she's terribly subtle in that way, though you mightn't think it—but she didn't. No; if Peter's in love with anyone, it's not with me."

Olivia braced herself to say: "And I hope it's not with me."

Drusilla went on counting.

"Did he ever say anything about that?" Olivia persisted.

Drusilla went on counting. "Eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. That's all of that set. What a lot of silver you've got! And some of it must have been in the family for thousands of years. Yes," she added in another tone, "yes, he did. He said he wasn't."

Olivia laid down with infinite precaution the ladle she was holding. She had got the stab she was looking for. It seemed for a minute as if she was free—gloatingly free! He hadn't cared anything about her after all, and had said so! She steadied herself by holding to the edge of the sideboard.

Drusilla stooped to the basket of silver standing on the floor, in a seemingly passionate desire for more forks. By the time she had straightened herself again Olivia was able to say: "I'm so glad of that. You know what his kindness in helping papa has made people think, don't you?"

But Mrs. Fane astonished her by throwing down her handful of silver with unnecessary violence of clang and saying: "Look here, Olivia, I'd rather not talk about it any more. I've reasons. I can't take a hand in your affairs without being afraid that perhaps—perhaps I—I—shan't play the game."

Olivia was silent, but she had much to think of.

It was a few days later still that she found herself in Rodney Temple's little office in the Gallery of Fine Arts. She had come ostensibly to tell him that everything had been arranged for the sale.

"Lemon and Company think that early in December would be the best time, as people are beginning then to spend money for Christmas. Mr. Lemon seems to think we've got a good many things the smaller connoisseurs will want. The servants are to go next Tuesday, so that if you and Cousin Cherry could take papa then—I'm to stay with Lulu Senter; and I shall go from her house to be married—some day, when everything else is settled. Did you know that before Mr. Davenant went away he left a small bank account for papa?—two or three thousand dollars—so that we have money to go on with. Rupert wants to spend a week or two in New York and Washington, after which we shall come back here and pick up papa. He's not very keen on coming with us, but I simple couldn't——"

He nodded at the various points in her recital, blinking at her searchingly out of his kind old eyes.

"You look pale," he said, "and old. You look forty."

She surprised him by saying with a sudden outburst: "Cousin Rodney, do you think it's any harm for a woman to marry one man when she's in love with another?" Before he had time to recover himself she followed this question with a second. "Do you think it's possible for a person to be in love with two people at the same time?"

He understood now the real motive of her visit.

"I'm not a very good judge of love affairs," he said, after a minute's reflection. "But one thing I know, and it's this—that when we do our duty we don't have to bother with the question as to whether it's any harm or not."

"We may do our duty, and still make people unhappy."

"No; not unless we do it in the wrong way."

"So that if I feel that to go on and keep my word is the right thing—or rather the only thing——?"

"That settles it, dearie. The right thing *is* the only thing—and it makes for everybody's happiness."

"Even if it seems that it—it *couldn't*."

"I'm only uttering platitudes, dearie, when I say that happiness is the flower of right. No other plant can grow it; and that plant can't grow any other flower. When you've done the thing you feel you're called to do—the thing you couldn't refuse while still keeping your self-respect—well, then, you needn't be afraid that any one will suffer in the long run—and yourself least of all."

"In the long run! That means——"

"Oh, there may be a short run. I'm not denying that. But no one worth his salt would be afraid of it. And that, dearie," he added, blinking, "is all I know about love affairs."

There being no one in the gallery on which the office opened, she kissed him as she thanked him and went

away. She walked homeward, taking the more retired streets through Cambridge and into Waverton, so as to be the more free for thinking. It was a relief to her to have spoken out. Oddly enough, she felt her heart lighter towards Davenant from the mere fact of having told some one, or having partially told some one, that she loved him.

When, on turning in at the gate of Tory Hill, she saw a taxicab standing below the steps of the main entrance she was not surprised, since Ashley occasionally took one to run out from town. But when a little lady in furs and an extravagant hat stepped out to pay the chauffeur, Olivia stopped to get her breath. If it hadn't been impossible she would have said——

But the taxicab whizzed away, and the little lady tripped up the steps.

Olivia felt herself unable to move. The motor throbbed past her, and out of the gate, but she still stood incapable of going farther. It seemed long before the pent-up emotions of the last month or two, controlled, repressed, unacknowledged as they had been, found utterance in one loud cry: "Aunt Vic!"

Not till that minute had she guessed her need of a woman, a Guion, one of her very own, a mother, on whose breast to lay her head and weep her cares out.

The first tears since the beginning of her trials came to Olivia Guion as, with arms clasped round her aunt, and forehead pressed into the little old lady's furs, she sat beside her on a packing-case in the hall. She cried then as she never knew before she was capable of crying. She cried for the joy of the present, for the trouble of the past, and for the relief of clinging to some one to whom she had a right. Madame le Melcourt would have cried with her, had it not been for the effect of tears on cosmetics.

"There, there, my pet," she murmured soothingly. "Didn't you know your old auntie would come to you? Why didn't you cable? Didn't you know I was right

at the end of the wire? There now, cry all you want to. It'll do you good. Your old auntie has come to take all your troubles away, and see you happily married to your Englishman. She's brought your *dot* in her pocket—same old *dot!*—and everything. There now, cry. There's nothing like it."

XXII

TO Madame de Melcourt the chief novelty of American life, for the first few days at least, lay in the absence of any necessity for striving. To wake up in the morning into a society not keeping its heart hermetically shut against her was distinctly a new thing. Not to have to plan or push or struggle, to take snubs or repay them, to wriggle in where she was not wanted, or to keep people out where she had wriggled in, was really amusing. In the wide friendliness by which she found herself surrounded she had a droll sense of having reached some scholastic paradise painted by Puvis de Chavannes. She was even seated on a kind of throne, like Justitia or Sapientia, with all kinds of flattering, welcoming attentions both from old friends who could remember her when she had lived as a girl among them and new ones who were eager to take her into hospitable arms. It was decidedly funny. It was like getting into a sphere where all the wishes were gratified and there were no more worlds to conquer. It would pall in the end; in the end she would come to feel like a gourmet in a heaven where there is no eating, or an Englishman in some Blessed Isle where there is no sport; but for the moment it offered that refreshing change which strengthens the spirit for taking up the more serious things of life again. In any case, it put her into a good-humour of which the residents at Tory Hill were the first to feel the effect.

"Il est très bien, ton Anglais."

Olivia acknowledged this approval with a smile and a blush, as she went about the drawing-room trying to give it something of its former air. With the new turn of events it had become necessary to restore the house to a condition fit for occupancy. Madame le Melcourt had moved into it with her maid and her man, announcing her intention to remain till she got ready to depart. Her bearing was that of Napoleon making a temporary stay in some German or Italian palace for the purposes of national reorganization and public weal. At the present instant she was enthroned amid cushions in a corner of the sofa, watching Olivia dispose of such bric-à-brac as had not been too remotely packed away.

"I always say," the old lady declared, "that when an Englishman is chic he's very chic, and your Ashley is no exception. I don't wonder you're in love with him."

When seated the Marquise accompanied her words with little jerkings and perkings of her fluffy head, with wavings of the hands and rolling of the eyes—the correlatives of her dartings and dashings while on her feet.

It was easy for Olivia to keep her back turned while she managed to say: "He thinks you don't like him."

Madame shrugged her shoulders. "I like him as well as I could like any Englishman. He's very smart. You can see at a glance he's some one. From what I'd heard of him—his standing by you and all that—I was afraid he might be an eccentric."

"Whom did you hear it from?"

"Oh, I heard it. There's nothing wonderful in that. A thing that's been the talk of Boston and New York and telegraphed to the London papers—you don't suppose I shouldn't hear of it some time. And I came right over—just as soon as I was convinced you needed me."

Olivia looked round with misty eyes. "I shall never forget it, Aunt Vic, dear—nor your kindness to papa. He feels it more than he can possibly express to you—your taking what he did so—so gently."

"Ma foi! The Guions must have money. When it comes to spending they're not morally responsible. I'm the only one among them who ever had a business head; and even with me, if it hadn't been for my wonderful Hamlet and Tecla—— But you can see what I am at heart—throwing two million francs into your lap as if it were a box of bonbons."

"I'm not sure that you ought, you know."

"And what about the Guion family honour and all that? Who's to take care of it if I don't? The minute I heard what had happened I held up my head and said, Everything may go so long as the credit of the Guion name is saved. N'est-ce pas? We can't live in debt to the old man who advanced your papa the money."

"He isn't an old man at all," Olivia explained quickly.

"Ca ne fait rien. His age isn't the question. I suppose he lent the money expecting us to pay him back at a handsome rate of interest."

"No, he didn't. That's just it. He lent it to us—out of—out of——"

"Yes; out of what?"

"Out of pure goodness," she said firmly.

"Fiddle-faddle! People don't do things out of pure goodness. The man who seems to is either a sentimentalist or a knave. If he's a sentimentalist, he does it for effect; if he's a knave, because it helps roguery. There's always some axe to grind."

"I think you'd have to make an exception of Mr. Davenant."

"Davenant? Is that his name? Yes, I believe your papa did tell me so—the boy Tom Davenant fished out of the slums."

With some indignation Olivia told the story of Davenant's birth and adoption. "So you see," she went on, "he has goodness in his blood. There's no reason why that shouldn't be inherited so much as—as insanity—or a taste for alcohol."

"Stuff, dear! The man or the boy, or whatever he is, calculated on getting something better than he gave. We must simply pay him off and get rid of him. Noblesse oblige."

"We may get rid of him, Aunt Vic, but we can never pay him off."

"He'll be paid off, won't he, if we return his loan at an interest of five—I'm willing to say six—per cent?'"

Olivia came forward, looking distressed. "Oh, I hope you won't, dear Aunt Vic. I mean about the five or six per cent. Give him back his money if you will, only give it back in the—in the princely way in which he let us have it."

"Well, I call that princely—six per cent."

"Oh, please, Aunt Vic! You'd offend him. You'd hurt him. He's just the sort of big, sensitive creature that's most easily wounded, and——"

"Tiens! You interest me. Stop fidgeting round the room and come and tell me about him. Sit down," she commanded, pointing to the other corner of the sofa. "There must be a lot I haven't heard."

If Olivia hesitated, it was chiefly because of her own eagerness to talk of him, to sing his praises. Since, however, she must sooner or later learn to do this with self-possession, she fortified herself to begin. With occasional interruptions from her aunt she told the tale as she understood it, taking as point of departure the evening when Davenant came to dine at Tory Hill, on his return from his travels round the world.

"So there was a time when you didn't like him," was Madame de Melcourt's first comment.

"There was a time when I didn't understand him."

"But when you did understand him you changed your mind."

"I couldn't help it."

"And did you change anything more than your—mind?"

There was so much insinuation in the cracked voice

that Olivia coloured, in spite of the degree in which she thought herself armed against all surprises. It was a minute or more before she was prepared with an answer.

"I changed my attitude toward him. Before that I'd been hostile and insolent, and then—and then—I grew humble. Yes, Aunt Vic—humble. I grew more than humble. I came to feel—well, as you might feel if you'd struck a great St. Bernard dog who'd been rescuing you in the snow. There's something about him that makes you think of a St. Bernard—so big and true and loyal——"

"Did you ever think he might be in love with you?"

She was ready for this question, and had made up her mind to answer it frankly. "Yes. I was afraid he was advancing the money on that account. I felt so right up to—to a few days ago."

"And what happened then?"

"Drusilla told me he'd said he—wasn't."

Madame de Melcourt let that pass. "Did you think he'd fallen in love with you all of a sudden when he came that night to dinner?"

She resolved to tell the whole truth.

"I'd known him before. He asked me to marry him years ago. And something happened. I hardly know how to tell you. I didn't answer him."

"Didn't answer him?"

"I got up and walked away, right in the middle of—of what he was trying to tell me."

"Tiens! And you had to take his money after all!"

Olivia bowed her head.

"Ca c'est trop fort," the old lady went on. "You're quite right then when you say you'll never be able to pay him off, even if you get rid of him. But he's paid *you* off, hasn't he? It's a more beautiful situation than I fancied. He didn't tell me that."

Olivia looked up. "He didn't tell you? Who?"

"Your papa," the old lady said promptly. "It's perfectly lovely, isn't it? I should think when you meet

him you must feel frightfully ashamed. Don't you?"

"I should if there wasn't something about him that——"

"And you'll never get over it," the old lady went on pitilessly, "not even after you've married the other man. The humiliation will haunt you—toujours—toujours! N'est-ce pas? If it were I, I should want to marry a man I'd done a thing like that to—just to carry it off. But *you* can't, can you? You've *got* to marry the other man. Even if you weren't so horribly in love with him, you'd have to marry him, when he's stood by you like that. I should be ashamed of you if you didn't."

"Of course, Aunt Vic."

"If he were to back out that would be another thing. But as it is you've got to swallow your humiliation with regard to this Davenant. Or, rather, you can't swallow it. You've simply got to live on it, so to speak. You'll never be able to forget for an hour of the day that you treated a man like that—and then took his money, will you. It isn't exactly like striking a St. Bernard who's rescuing you in the snow. It's like beating him first and then having him come and save you afterward. Oh, là là! Quelle drôle de chose que la vie! Well, it's a good thing we can return his money, at the least."

"You're so good about that, dear Aunt Vic. I didn't understand I was to have it when I couldn't see my way to—to——"

"To marry Berteuil. That's all over and done with. I see you weren't made for life in the real world. Anyhow," she added, taking a virtuous air, "when my word was passed it was passed. Not that your *dot* will do you much good. It'll all have to go to settle the claims of this Mr.—— By the way, where is he? Why doesn't he come and be paid?"

"He's out in Michigan, at a little place called Stoughton."

"Then send for him."

"I'm not sure we can get him. Cousin Cherry has written to him three times since he went away, and he doesn't answer."

"Cousin Cherry! What a goose! Who'd ever think she was the pretty Charlotte Hawke that Rodney Temple fell in love with. What's the matter with you, over here, that you all grow old at a minute's notice, so to speak! I never saw such a lot of frumps as the women who used to be my own contemporaries. Rodney and I were very good friends once. If I could only have settled down in humdrum old Waverton—but we'll let bygones be bygones, and send for your man."

"I'll ask Cousin Cherry to write to him again."

"Stuff, dear. That won't do any good. Wire him yourself, and tell him I'm here."

"Oh, but, Aunt Vic, dear."

With little perkings of the head and much rolling of the eyes the Marquise watched the warm colour rise in Olivia's cheek and surge slowly upwards to the temples. Madame de Melcourt made signs of trying to look anywhere and everywhere, up to the ceiling and down at the floor, rather than be a witness of so much embarrassment. She emphasised her discretion, too, by making a great show of seeing nothing in particular, toying with her rings and bracelets till Olivia had sufficiently recovered to be again commanded to send for Davenant.

"Tell him I'm here and that I want to have a look at him. Use my name so that he'll see it's urgent. Then you can sign the telegram with your own. Cousin Cherry! Stuff!"

Later that day Madame de Melcourt was making a confession to Rodney Temple.

"Oui, mon bon Rodney. It was love at first sight. The thing hadn't happened to me for years."

"Had it been in the habit of happening?"

"In the habit of happening—that's too much to say. I may have had a little toquade from time to time—I don't say no—of an innocence!—or nearly of an innocence!—Mais que voulez-vous?—a woman in my position!—a widow since I was so high!—and exposed to the most flattering attentions. You know nothing about it over here. L'amour est l'enfant de Bohème, as the song says, and, whatever you can say for Waverton and Cambridge and Boston, you'll admit——"

He leaned back in his rocking-chair with a laugh.

"One does the best one can, Vic. We're children of opportunity as well as enfants de Bohème. If your chances have been more generous, and I presume more tempting, than ours, it isn't kind of you to come back and taunt us."

"Don't talk about tempting, Rodney. You can't imagine how tiresome those men become—always on the hunt for money—always trying to find a wife who'll support them without their having to work. I speak of the good people, of course. With the bourgeoisie it's different. They work and take care of their families like other people. Only they don't count. If I hadn't money—they'd slam the door on me like that." She indicated the violence of the act by gesture. "As it is, they smother me. There are three of them at Melcourt-le-Danois at this present moment—Anne Marie de Melcourt's two boys and one girl. They're all waiting for me to supply the funds with which they're to make rich marriages. Is it any wonder that I look upon what's done for my own niece as so much saved? Henry's getting into such a hole seemed to me providential—gives me the chance to snatch something away from them before they—and when it's to go ultimately to *him*——"

"The young fellow you've taken such a fancy to?"

"You'd have taken a fancy to him, too, if you'd known only men who make it a trade to ask all and give next to nothing in return. You'd be smitten to

e core by a man who asks nothing and offers all, he were as ugly as a gargoyle. But when he takes e form of a blond Hercules, with eyes blue as the vosotis, and a moustache—mais une moustache!—d with no idea whatever of the bigness of the thing 's doing! It was the thunderbolt, Rodney—le coup foudre—and no wonder!"

"I hope you told him so."

"I was very stiff with him. I sent him about his isiness just like that." She snapped her fingers. But I only meant it with reserves. I let him see ow I had been wronged—how cruelly Olivia had misnderstood me—but I showed him, too, how I could rgive." She tore at her breast as though to lay bare er heart. "Oh, I impressed him—not all at once erhaps—but little by little——"

"As he came to know you."

"I wouldn't let him go away. He stayed at the inn the village two weeks and more. It's an old chef of ine who keeps it. And I learned all his secrets. He nought he was throwing dust in my eyes, but he didn't nrow a grain. As if I couldn't see who was in love with ho—after all my experience! Ah, mon bon Rodney, I'd been fifty years younger! And yet if I'd been fty years younger, I shouldn't have judged him at his vorth. He's the type to which you can do justice only vhen you've a standard of comparison, n'est-ce pas? t's in putting him beside other men—the best—even Ashley over there—that you see how big he is."

She tossed her hand in the direction of Ashley and Drusilla, sitting by the tea-table at the other end of the room. Mrs. Temple had again found errands of mercy to insure her absence.

"Il est très bien, cet Ashley," the Marquise continued, "chic—distinguished—no more like a wooden man than any other Englishman. Il est très bien—but what a difference!—two natures—the one a mountain pool, fierce, deep, hemmed in all round—the other the great

sea. Voilà—Ashley et mon Davenant. And he helpe me. He gave me courage to stand up against th Melcourt—to run away from them. Oh, yes, we ra away—almost. I made a pretext for going to Paris– the old pretext, the dentist. They didn't suspect at m age—how should they?—or they wouldn't have let m come alone. Helie or Paul or Anne Marie would hav come with me. Oh, they smother me! But we ra away. We took the train to Cherbourg, just like tw eloping lovers—and the bateau de luxe, the 'Louisiana to New York. Mais hélas! ——"

She paused to laugh, and at the same time to das away a tear. "At New York we parted, never to mee again—so he thinks. His work was done! He wer straight to that funny place in Michigan to join his pa He's there now—waiting to hear that Olivia has marrie her Englishman, as you might wait to hear that sentenc of death on some one you were fond of had been carrie out. Ah, mon Dieu, quel brave homme! I'm proud t belong to the people who produced him. I don't kno that I ever was before."

"Oh, the world is full of brave fellows, when th moment comes to try them."

"Perhaps. I'm not convinced. What about *him?* She flicked her hand again towards Ashley. "Would h stand a big test?"

"He's stood a good many of them, I understand. He certainly been equal to his duty here."

"He's done what a gentleman couldn't he doing. That's something, but it's possible to as more."

"I hope you're not going to ask it," he began, some anxiety.

"He strikes me as a man who would grant what w wrung from him, while the other—my blond Hercules- gives royally, like a king."

"There's a soul that climbs as by a ladder, and there a soul that soars naturally as a lark. I don't kno

that it matters which they do, so long as they both mount upward."

"We shall see."

"What shall we see? I hope you're not up to anything, Vic?"

With another jerk of her hand in the direction of Ashley and Drusilla, she said, "That's the match that should have——"

But the old man was out of his seat. "You must excuse me now, Vic. I've some work to do."

"Yes, be off. Only——"

She put her forefinger on her lips, rolling her eyes under the brim of her extravagant hat with an expression intended to exclude from their pact of confidence not only the other two occupants of the room, but every one else.

Olivia received the reply to her telegram: "Shall arrive in Boston Wednesday night."

Considering it time to bring the purely financial side of the situation under discussion, Madame de Melcourt explained to her niece that she, the Marquise, had nothing to do, in her own person, with the extraordinary creature who was about to arrive. Her part would be accomplished when once she had handed over the *dot* either to Olivia or to her trustees. As the passing of this sum through Miss Guion's hands was to be no more than a formality, the question of trustees was not worth taking up. With the transfer of securities for the amount agreed upon from the one name to the other—a piece of business which would be carried out by Davis & Stern—the Marquise considered that she would have done all for which she could be called upon. Everything else concerned Olivia and her father and Davenant. Her own interest in the young man would be satisfied with a glance of curiosity.

The brief conversation to this effect having taken place before luncheon, Madame de Melcourt pursued other aspects of the subject with Colonel Ashley when that repast was ended and coffee was being served to

them in the library. Olivia having withdrawn to wait on her father, Madame de Melcourt bade him light his cigar while she herself puffed daintily at a cigarette. If she was a little grotesque in doing it, he had seen more than one elderly Englishwoman who, in the same pastime, was even more so.

Taking one thing with another, he liked his future great-aunt by marriage. If he was disconcerted, it was by her odd way of keeping him at arm's-length.

"She doesn't like me, what?" he had more than once said to Olivia, and with some misgiving.

Olivia could only answer: "I think she must. She's said a good many times that you were chic and distinguished. That's a great deal for any Englishman from her."

"She acts as if she had something up her sleeve."

Nevertheless he was glad to be alone with Madame de Melcourt. It was the moment he had waited for, the moment of paying some fitting tribute to her generosity. He had said little of it hitherto, not wanting, as he put it, "to drag it in by the hair of its head." He knew an opportunity would arise; and it had arisen.

He was easily capable of turning a nice little speech. Apart from the fear of transgressing the canons of negative good form he would have enjoyed turning one. As it was, he assumed a stammer and a drawl, jerking out a few inarticulate phrases of which the lady could distinguish only "so awfully good of you" and "never forget your jolly kindness." This being masculine, soldier-like, and British, he was hurt to notice an amused smile on the Marquise's lips.

In contrast to his deliberate insufficiency the old lady's thin voice was silvery and precise. Out of some bit of obscure wilfulness, roused by his being an Englishman, she accentuated her Parisian affectations.

"I'm very much delighted, Col-on-el," she said, giving the military title its three distinct French syllables

"but you must not think me better than I am. I'm very fond of my niece—and of her father. After all, they stand nearer to me than anyone else in the world. They're all I've got of my very own. In any case, they should have had the money some day—when I—that is, I'd made my will, n'est-ce pas? But what matters a little sooner or a little later? And I want my niece to be happy. I want a great many things; but when I've sifted them all, I think I want that more than anything else."

Ashley bowed. "We shall always feel greatly indebted——" he began, endeavouring to be more elegant than in his words of a few minutes earlier.

"I want her to be happy, Col-on-el. She deserves it. She's a noble creature, with a heart of gold and a spirit of iron. And she loves me, I think."

"I know she does, by Jove!"

"And I can't think of anyone else who does love me for myself." She gave a thin, cackling laugh. "They love my money. Le bon Dieu has counted me worthy of having a good deal during these later years. And they're all very fond of it. But she's fond of *me*. I was very angry with her once; but now I want her to be happy with the man—with the man she's in love with. So when Mr. Davenant came and told me of your noble character——"

"The devil he did!"

Ashley sprang out of his chair. The cigar dropped from his limp fingers. In stooping to pick it up he caught the echo of his own exclamation. "I beg your pardon——" he began, when he had raised himself. He grew redder than ever; his eyes danced.

"Ca ne fait rien, Col-on-el. It's an expression of which I myself often use the equivalent—in French. But I don't wonder you're pleased. Your friend Mr. Davenant made the journey to Europe purposely to tell me how highly you were qualified as a suitor for my niece's hand. When one has a friend like that——"

"But he's not my friend."

"You surprise me, Col-on-el. He spoke of you wit so much praise—so much affection, I might say. H said no one could be so worthy to marry my niece—n one could make her so happy—no one could give he such a distinguished position in the world—no on was so fine a fellow in his own person——"

He looked mystified. "But he's out there in Michi gan——"

She puffed delicately at her cigarette. "He staye with me two weeks at Melcourt-le-Danois. That is, h stayed at the inn in the village. It was the same thin I was very angry with my niece before that. It wa he who made me see differently. If it were not fo him I shouldn't be here. He travelled to France ex pressly to beg my help—how shall I say?—on you behalf—in simplifying things—so that you and Olivi might be free from your sense of obligation to him— and might marry——"

"Did he say he was in love with her himself?"

She ignored the hoarse suffering in his voice to tak another puff or two at her cigarette. "Ma foi, Co on-el, he didn't have to."

"Did he say——" He swallowed hard, and bega again more hoarsely: "Did he say she was—in lov with—with *him?*"

There was a hint of rebuke in her tone. "He's very loyal gentleman. He didn't."

"Did he make you think——?"

"What he made me think, Col-on-el, is my ow affair."

He jumped to his feet, throwing his cigar violentl into the fire. For a minute or two he stood glaring the embers. When he turned on her it was savagely.

"May I ask your motive in springing this on m Marquise?"

"Mon Dieu, Col-on-el, I thought you'd like to kno what a friend you have."

"Damn his friendship! That's not the reason. You've something up your sleeve."

She looked up at him innocently. "Have I? Then I must leave it to you to tell me what it is. But when you do," she added, smiling, "I hope you'll take another tone. In France men are gallant with women——"

"And in England women are straight with men. What they have to say they say. They don't lay snares, or lie in ambush."

She laughed. "Quant à cela, Col-on-el, il y en a pour tous les goûts, même en Angleterre."

"I'll bid you good-bye, madame."

He bowed stiffly, and went out into the hall. She continued to smoke daintily, pensively, while she listened to him noisily pulling on his overcoat and taking his stick from the stand. As he passed the library door he stopped on the threshold.

"By Gad, she's *mine!*" he said fiercely.

She got up and went to him, taking him by the lapel of the coat. There was something like a pity in her eyes as she said: "My poor fellow, nobody has raised that question. What's more, nobody *will* raise it—unless you do yourself."

XXIII

ASHLEY'S craving was for space and air. He felt choked, strangled. There was a high wind blowing, carrying a sleety rain. It was a physical comfort to turn into the teeth of it.

He tramped for an hour or more, finding himself at last amid bleak, dreary marshes, over which the November twilight was coming down. He felt lonely, desolate, far from his familiar things, far from home. He turned back towards the town. He did so with a feeling of futility in the act. Where should he go? What should he do? How was he to deal with this

new, extraordinary feature in the case? It was impos sible to return to Tory Hill, as if the Marquise had tol him nothing, and equally impossible to make what sh had said a point of departure for anything else.

It was a solution of the instant's difficulties to avoi the turning to Tory Hill and go on to Drusilla Fane's In the wind and rain and gathering darkness the though of her fireside was cheering. She would understan him, too. She had always understood him. It wa her knowledge of the English point of view that mad her such an efficient pal. During all the trying four o five weeks through which he had passed she had bee able to give him sympathetic support just where an when he needed it. It was something to know sh would give it to him again.

As he told her of Davenant's journey to France h could see her eyes grow bigger and blacker than ever i the flickering firelight. She kept them on him all th while he talked. She kept them on him as from tim to time she lifted her cup and sipped her tea.

"Then that's why he didn't answer mother's letters, she said absently, when he had finished. "He wasn there."

"He wasn't there, by Jove! And don't you see wha a fix he's put me in?"

She replied, still absently, "I'm not sure that I do.

"He's given away the whole show to me. Th question is now whether I can take it, what?"

"He hasn't given away anything you didn't hav before."

"He's given away something he might perhaps hav had himself."

She drew back into the shadow so that he might no see her colouring. She had only voice enough to say "What makes you think so?"

"Don't *you* think so?"

"That's not a fair question."

"It's a vital one."

"To you—yes. But——"

"But not to you. Oh, I understand that well enough. But you've been such a good pal that I thought you might help me to see——"

"I'm afraid I can't help you to see anything. If I were to try I might mislead you."

"But you must *know*, by Jove! Two women can't be such pals as Olivia and you——"

"If I did know I shouldn't tell you. It's something you should find out for yourself."

"Find out! I've *asked* her."

"Well, if she's told you, isn't that enough?"

"It would be enough in England. But here, where words don't seem to have the same meaning as they do anywhere else—and surprises are sprung on you—and people have queer, complicated motives—and do preposterous unexpected things——"

"Peter's going to see old Cousin Vic might be unexpected; but I don't think you can call it preposterous."

"It's preposterous to have another man racing about the world trying to do you good, by Jove!"

"He wasn't trying to do you good so much as not to do you harm. He thought he'd done that, apparently, by interfering with Cousin Henry's affairs in the first place. His asking the old Marquise to come to the rescue was only an attempt to make things easier for you."

He sprung to his feet. "And he's got me where I must either call his bluff or—or—or accept his beastly sacrifice."

He tugged fiercely, first at one end, then at the other, of the bristling, horizontal moustache. Drusilla tried to speak calmly.

"He's not making a sacrifice if there was nothing for him to give up."

"That's what I must find out."

She considered it only loyal to say, "It's well to remember that in making the attempt you may do

more harm than good. 'Where the apple reddens, never pry, lest we lose our Edens'—— You know the warning."

"Yes, I know. That's Browning. In other words, it means, let well enough alone."

"Which isn't bad advice, you know."

"Which isn't bad advice—except in love. Love won't put up with reserves. It must have all—or it will take nothing."

He dropped into a low chair at the corner of the hearth. Wielding the poker in both hands, he knocked sparks idly from a smouldering log. It was some minutes before she ventured to say—

"And suppose you discovered you couldn't *get* all?"

"I've thought that out. I should go home, and ask to be allowed to join the first punitive expedition sent out—one of those jolly little parties from which they don't expect more than half the number to come back. There's one just starting now—against the Carrals—up on the Tibet frontier. I dare say I could catch it."

Again some minutes went by before she said, "Is it as bad as all that?"

"It's as bad as all that."

She got up because she could no longer sit still. His pain was almost more than she could bear. At the moment she would have given life just to be allowed to lay her hand soothingly on his shoulder or to stroke his bowed head. As it was, she could barely give herself the privilege of taking one step toward him, and even in doing this she was compelled to keep behind him, lest she should betray herself in the approach.

"Couldn't I——?"

The offer of help was in the tone, in its timid beseeching.

He understood it, and shook his head without looking up.

"No," he said briefly. "No. No one can."

She remained standing behind him, because she

hadn't the strength to go away. He continued to knock sparks from the log. Repulsed from the sphere of his suffering, she was thrown back on her own. She wondered how long she would stand there, how long he would sit, bending like that, over the dying fire. It was the most intolerable minute of her life, and yet he didn't know it. Just for the instant she resented that—that while he could get the relief of openness and speech, she must be condemned for ever to shame and silence. If she could have thrown herself on her knees beside him and flung her arms about his neck, crying, "I love you; I love you! Whoever doesn't—*I* do!—*I* do!" she would have felt that life had reached fruition.

The minutes became more unendurable. In sheer self-defence she was obliged to move, to say something, to break the tensity of the strain. One step—the single step by which she had dared to draw nearer him, stretching out yearning hands toward him—one step sufficed to take her back to the world of conventionalities and commonplaces, where the heart's aching is taboo.

She must say something, no matter what, and the words that came were "Won't you have another cup of tea?"

He shook his head, still without looking up. "Thanks; no."

But she was back again on her own ground, back from the land of enchantment and anguish. It was like returning to an empty home after a journey of poignant romance. She was mistress of herself again, mistress of her secret and her loneliness. She could command her voice too. She could hear herself saying, as if some one else were speaking from the other side of the room;

"It seems to me you take it too tragically to begin with——"

"It isn't to begin with. I saw there was a screw loose from the first. And since then some one has told me that she was—half in love with him, by Jove!—as it was."

She remained standing beside the tea-table. "That

must have been Cousin Henry. He'd have a motive i thinking so—not so much to deceive you as to deceiv himself. But if it's any comfort to you to know it, I'v talked to them both. I suppose they spoke to me con fidentially, and I haven't felt justified in betraying them But rather than see you suffer——"

He put the poker in its place among the fire-iron and swung round in his chair toward her. "Oh, say! It isn't suffering, you know. That is, i isn't——"

She smiled feebly. "Oh, I know what it is. Yo don't have to explain. But I'll tell you. I aske Peter—or practically asked him—some time ago- if he was in love with her—and he said he wasn't."

His face brightened. "Did he, by Jove?"

"And when I told her that—the other day—sh said——"

"Yes? Yes? She said——"

"She didn't put it in so many words—but she gav me to understand—or *tried* to give me to understand- that it was a relief to her—because, in that case, sh wasn't obliged to have him on her mind. A woma *has* those things on her mind, you know, about or man when she loves another."

He jumped up. "I say! You're a good pal. shall never forget it."

He came toward her, but she stepped back at h approach. She was more sure of herself in the shado

"Oh, it's nothing——"

"You see," he tried to explain, "it's this way wi me. I've made it a rule in my life to do—well, a litt more than the right thing—to do the high thing, if y understand—and that fellow has a way of getting damnably on top. I can't allow it, you know. I to you so the other day."

"You mean, if he does something fine, you must something finer."

He winced at this. "I can't go on swallowing h

beastly favours, don't you see? And hang it all! if he is—if he *is* my rival—he must have a show."

"And how are you going to give him a show if he won't take it?"

He started to pace up and down the room. "That's your beastly America, where everything goes by freaks—where everything is queer and inconsequent and tortuous, and you can't pin anyone down."

"It seems to me, on the contrary, that you have every one pinned down. You've got everything your own way, and yet you aren't satisfied. Peter has taken himself off; old Cousin Vic has paid the debts; and Olivia is ready to go to church and marry you on the first convenient day. What more can you ask?"

"That's what *she* said, by Jove!—the old Marquise. She said the question would never be raised unless I raised it."

Drusilla tried to laugh. "Eh, bien? as she'd say herself."

He paused in front of her. "Eh, bien, there *is* something else; and," he added, tapping his forehead sharply, "I'll be hanged if I know what it is."

She was about to say something more when the sound of the shutting of the street-door stopped her. There was much puffing and stamping, with shouts for Jane to come and take an umbrella.

"I say, that's your governor. I'll go and talk to him."

He went without another look at her. She steadied herself with the tips of her fingers on the tea-table, in order not to swoon. She knew she wouldn't swoon; she only felt like it, or like dying. But all she could do was limply to pour herself out an extra cup of tea and drink it.

In the library Ashley was taking heart of grace. He had come to ask advice, but he was really pointing out the things that were in his favour. He repeated Drusilla's summing-up of them almost word for word.

"You see, as far as that goes, I've everything my own

way. No question will be raised unless I raise it. The fellow has taken himself off; the Marquise has most generously assumed the family liabilities; and Olivia is ready to come to church with me and be married on the first convenient day. I should be satisfied with that, now shouldn't I?"

The old man nodded. "Your difficulties do seem to have been smoothed out."

He sat, fitting the tips of his fingers together and swinging his leg in his desk-chair. The light of the green-shaded desk-lamp alone lit up the room. In the semi-obscurity porcelains and potteries gleamed like crystals in a cave. Ashley paced the floor, emerging from minute to minute out of the gloom into the radiance of the lamp.

"I'm not called on to go poking behind things to see what's there, now am I?"

"Not in the least."

"I'm willing to consider every one, and I think I do. But there are limits, by Jove! Now, really?"

"The minute we recognize limits it's our duty not to go beyond them. It's thus far and no farther—for the man who knows the stretch of his tether, at any rate. The trouble with Peter is that his tether is elastic. It'll spin out as far as he sees the need to go. For the rest of us there are limits, as you say; but about him there's something—something you might call limitless."

Ashley rounded sharply. "You mean he's so big that no one can be bigger."

"Not exactly. I mean that very few of us *need* to be as big as that. It's all very well for him; but most of us have to keep within the measure of our own capacity."

"And sit down under him, while he looms up into God knows where?"

"Well, wouldn't that be your idea?"

"Can't say that it is. My idea is that when I take my rights and keep them, I'm as big as anyone."

"Quite so; as big as anyone—who takes his rights and keeps them. That's very true."

Ashley stopped, one hand behind him, the other supporting him as he leaned on the desk. "And that's what I propose to do," he said aggressively.

"It's a very high ideal."

"I propose to accept the *status quo* without asking any more questions."

"I should think that would be a very good plan. A wise man—one of the wisest—wrote, apropos of well-disposed people who were seeking a standard of conduct: 'Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.' I should think you'd have every reason for that kind of self-approval."

"Do you mean that, sir? or are you—trying iton?"

"I am certainly not trying it on. The man who takes his rights and keeps them can be amply justified. If there's a counsel of perfection that goes beyond that standard—well, it isn't given to all men to receive it."

"Then you think it isn't given to me. You'd put me down as a good sort of chap who comes in second best."

"What makes you think I should do that?"

"Because—because—hang it all! If I let this fellow keep ahead of me—why, I *should* come in second best."

"You say *keep* ahead of you. Do you think he's ahead of you now?"

Ashley straightened himself. He looked uncomfortable. "He's got a pull, by Jove! He made that journey to France—and cracked me up to the Marquise—and wheedled her round—when all the while he must have known that he was hammering nails into his own coffin. He did it, too, after I'd insulted him and we'd had a row."

"Oh, that's nothing. To a fellow like him that sort of thing comes easy."

"It wouldn't come easy to me, by Jove!"

"Then it would be all the more to your credit, if you ever did anything of the kind."

The Englishman bounded away. Once more he began to pace the floor restlessly. The old man took his pipe from a tray and his tobacco-pouch from a drawer. Having filled the bowl, with meditative leisure, he looked round for a match. "Got a light?"

Ashley struck a vesta on the edge of his match-box and applied it to the old man's pipe.

"Should you say," he asked, while doing it, "that I ought to attempt anything in that line?"

"Certainly not—unless you want to—to get ahead."

"I don't want to stay behind."

"Then it's for you to judge, my son."

There was something like an affectionate stress on the two concluding monosyllables. Ashley backed off out of the lamplight.

"It's this way," he explained stammeringly; "I'm a British officer and gentleman. I'm a little more than that—since I'm a V.C. man—and a fellow—dash it all, I might as well say it!—I'm a fellow they have got their eye on—in the line of high office, don't you know? And I can't—I simply *can't*—let a chap like that make me a present of all his chances——"

"Did he have any?"

Ashley hesitated. "Before God, sir, I don't know—but I'm inclined to think—he had. If so, I suppose they're of as much value to him as mine to me."

"But not of any more."

He hesitated again. "I don't know about that. Perhaps they are. The Lord knows I don't see that lightly, for mine are—— Well, we needn't go into that. But I've got a good deal in my life, and I don't imagine that he, poor devil——"

"Oh, don't worry. A rich soil is never barren. When nothing is planted in it Nature uses it for flowers."

Ashley answered restively. "I see, sir, your sympathies are all on his side."

"Not at all. Quite the contrary. My certainties are on his side. My sympathies are on yours."

"Because you think I need them."

"Because I think you may."

"In case I——"

"In case you should condemn yourself in the thing you're going to allow."

"But what's it to be?"

"That's for you to settle with yourself."

He was silent a minute. When he spoke it was with some conviction. "I should like to do the right thing, by Jove!—the straight thing—if I only knew what it was."

"Oh, there'll be no trouble about that. In the Street called Straight, my son, there are lights to show the way."

"Rum old cove," was Ashley's comment to himself as he went back to Boston. "Got an answer to everything."

From the hotel he telephoned an excuse to Olivia for his unceremonious departure from Tory Hill. "Had an upset" was the phrase by which he conveyed his apologies, leaving it to her to guess the nature of his mischance. As she showed no curiosity on the point, he merely promised to come to luncheon in the morning.

During his dinner he set himself to think, though, amid the kaleidoscopic movement of the hotel dining-room, he got little beyond the stage of "mulling."

He was still beset by uncertainties when he went out to Waverton next morning. Impatient for some form of action, he made an early start. On the way he considered Rodney Temple's words of the previous afternoon, saying to himself, "In the Street called Straight there are lights to show the way, by Jove! Gad! I should like to know where they are."

Nevertheless, it had a clarifying effect on his vision to find, on walking into the drawing-room at Tory Hill, Miss Guion seated in conversation with Peter Davenant. As he had the advantage of seeing them a second before they noticed him, he got the impression that their conversation was earnest, confidential. Olivia

was seated in a corner of the sofa, Davenant in a low chair that gave him the appearance of being at her feet.

It was exactly the stimulus Ashley needed to bring his faculties into action. He was at once in possession of all his powers. The feeling inspired by the sight of them together transformed him on the instant into the quick, shrewd, diplomatic officer in whom he recognized himself. It was a feeling too complicated to be called jealousy, though jealousy might have been in it as an ingredient pang.

He nodded to Davenant before shaking hands with Miss Guion. "Hello! Back again?"

Davenant got up from his low chair with some embarrassment. Ashley bowed over Olivia's hand with unusual courtliness. He seated himself in the other corner of the sofa, as one who had a right to the place.

"I had to come East on business," Davenant explained at once.

Olivia hastened to corroborate this statement. "Aunt Vic wanted Mr. Davenant to come—to settle up all the things——"

"And I had another reason," Davenant interrupted nervously. "I was just beginning to tell Miss Guion about it when you came in. I've a job out there—in my work—that would suit Mr. Guion. It would be quite in his line—legal adviser to a company—and would give him occupation. He'd be earning money, and wouldn't feel laid aside; and if he was ill I could look after him as well as anyone. I—I'd like it."

Olivia looked inquiringly at Ashley. Her eyes were misty.

"Hadn't you better talk to *him* about it?" Ashley said.

"I thought I'd better speak to you and Miss Guion first. I understand you've offered to—to take him——"

"I shouldn't interfere with what suited him better, in any case. By the way, how did you like the 'Louisiana?'"

Davenant's jaw dropped. His blue eyes were wide

with amazement. It was Olivia who undertook to speak, with a little air of surprise that Ashley should make such an odd mistake.

"Mr. Davenant wasn't on the 'Louisiana.' It was Aunt Vic. Mr. Davenant has just come from the West. You do that by train."

"Of course he was on the 'Louisiana.' Landed on the—let me see!—she sailed again yesterday!—landed on the 20th, didn't you?"

"No, no," Olivia corrected again, smiling. "That was the day Aunt Vic landed. You're getting every one mixed."

"But they came together," Ashley persisted. "He brought her. Didn't you?"

The look on Olivia's face frightened Davenant. He got up and stood apologetically behind his chair. "You'll have to forgive me, Miss Guion," he stammered. "I—I deceived you. I couldn't think of anything else to do."

She leaned forward, looking up at him. "But I don't know what you did, as it is. I can't understand—what—what anyone is saying."

"Then I'll tell you, by Jove! All the time you thought he was out there at Michigan he was over in France, following up the Marquise. Tracked her like a bloodhound, what? Told her the whole story—how we'd got to a deadlock—and everything. Made her think that unless she came and bailed us out we'd be caught there for the rest of our lives."

Olivia's eyes were still lifted to Davenant's. "Is that true?"

"It's true, by Jove!—true as you live. What's more, he cracked me up as though I was the only man alive—said that when it came to a question of who was worthy—worthy to marry you—he wasn't fit to black my boots.'

"No," Davenant cried fiercely. "There was no question of me."

"Bosh! Bosh, my good fellow! When a man does what you've done there's no question of anyone but him."

The colour was hot in Davenant's cheeks, but he himself could not have told whether it came from astonishment or anger. "Since Colonel Ashley knows so well what happened, I shall leave him to tell it."

He was about to make his escape, when Olivia stopped him. "No, no. Wait—please wait. Tell me why you did it."

"I'll tell you," Ashley broke in. He spoke with a kind of nervous jauntiness. "I'll tell you, by Jove! We had a row. I called him a cad. I called him a damned cad. There *was* a damned cad present on that occasion—only—I didn't hit the right nail on the head. But that's not what I'm coming to. He struck me. He struck me right in the teeth, by Jove. And when a man strikes you, it's an insult that can only be wiped out by blood. Very well; he's offered it—his blood. He didn't wait for me to draw it. I suppose he thought I wouldn't go in for the heroic. So of his own accord he went over there to France and shed his heart's blood. in the hope that I might overlook his offence. All right, old chap; I overlook it."

With a laugh Ashley held his hand up toward Davenant, who ignored it.

"Miss Guion," Davenant said huskily, "Colonel Ashley is pleased to put his own interpretation on what was in itself a very simple thing. You mayn't think it a very creditable thing, but I'll tell you just what happened, and you can draw your own conclusions. I went over to France, and saw your aunt, the Marquise, and asked her to let me have my money back. That's the plain truth of it. She'll tell you so herself. I'd heard she was very fond of you—devoted to you—and that she was very rich and generous—and so I thought, if I told her exactly how matters stood, it would be a good chance to—to recoup myself—for the loan."

Ashley sprang up with another laugh. "He doe that well, doesn't he?" he said to Olivia. "Com along, old boy," he added, slipping his arm throug Davenant's. "If I let you stay here you'll perjure you very soul."

Davenant allowed himself to be escorted to the doo Over his shoulder Ashley called back to Olivia; "Fellow are never good friends till after they've had a fight."

XXIV

WHEN Ashley, after pushing Davenant gently ou into the hall, returned to Olivia, she was standin by the mantelpiece, where the five K'anghsi vase had been restored to their place in honour of the Marquise

"Rum chap, isn't he?" Ashley observed. "S awfully queer and American. No Englishman woul ever have taken a jaunt like that—after the old lad —on another chap's behalf. It wouldn't go down, yo know."

Olivia, leaning on the mantelpiece, with face partiall turned from him, made no reply.

He allowed some minutes to pass before saying "When I asked him how he liked the 'Louisiana' wanted to know. I'm thinking of taking her on he next trip home."

She turned slightly, lifting her eyes. There was wonderful light in them, and yet a light that seeme to shine from afar. "Wouldn't that be rather soon?

"It would give me time for all I want. Now tha I'm here I'd better take a look at New York and Washing ton, and perhaps get a glimpse of your South. I coul do that in three weeks."

She seemed to have some difficulty in getting he mind to follow his words. "I don't think I understan you."

There was a smile on his lips as he said, "Don't you *infer* anything?"

"If I inferred anything, it would be that you think of going home—alone."

"Well, that's it."

She turned fully round. For a long minute they stood staring at each other. Time and experience seemed both to pass over them before she uttered the one word—"Why?"

"Isn't it pretty nearly—self-evident?"

She shook her head. "Not to me."

"I'm surprised at that. I thought you would have seen how well we'd played our game, and that it's—up."

"I don't see—not unless you're trying to tell me that you've—that your feelings have undergone a——"

He was still smiling rather mechanically, though he tugged nervously at the end of his horizontal moustache. "Wouldn't it be possible—now that everything has turned out so—so beautifully—wouldn't it be possible to let the rest go without—without superfluous explanations?"

"I'm ready to do everything you like; but I can't help being surprised."

"That must be because I've been more successful than I thought I was. I fanced that—when I saw how things were with you—you saw how they were with me—and that——"

"Saw how they were with you? Do you mean?—No, you can't mean!—it isn't—Drusilla?"

Since Drusilla would do as well as another, he still stood smiling. She clasped her hands. Her face was all aglow.

"Oh, I should be so glad! It's only within a few days that I've seen—how it was—with——"

He hastened to interrupt her, though he had no idea of what she was going to say. "Then so long as you do see——"

"Oh yes; I—I begin to see. I'm afraid I've been very stupid. You've been so kind—so noble—when all the while——"

"We won't discuss that, what? We won't discuss each other at all. Even if you go your way and I go—mine, we shall still be——"

He didn't finish, because she dropped again to the sofa, burying her face in the cushions. It was the first time he had ever seen her give way to deep emotion. If he had not felt so strong to carry the thing through to the end, he would have been unnerved. As it was, he sat down beside her, bending over her bowed head. He made no attempt to touch her.

"I can't bear it," he could hear her panting. "I can't bear it."

"What is it that you can't bear? The pain?"

She nodded without raising her head.

"Or the happiness?" he asked gently.

She nodded again.

"That is," he went on, "pain for me—and happiness about—about—the other chap."

She made the same mute sign of affirmation.

"Then, perhaps, that's just as it should be."

When Ashley got out to the road Davenant was still standing by the gate, uncertain whether to turn back to the house or go away. Ashley continued to smile jauntily. If he was white about the temples and sallow in the cheeks there was no one to notice it.

"Miss Guion wants to see you," he announced to Davenant. "It's about that matter of her father. I dare say you'll pull it off. No, not just now," he added, as Davenant started to go up the driveway. "She—she's busy. Later will do. Say this afternoon. Come along with me. I've got something to tell you. I'm on my way to the Temples'."

Once more Ashley slipped his arm through Davenant's, but they walked on in silence. The silence

continued till they were on the embankment, when Ashley said, "On second thoughts, I shan't tell you what I was going to just now."

"That's all right," Davenant rejoined; and no more was said till they reached Rodney Temple's door.

"Good-bye." Ashley offered his hand. "Good-bye. You're a first-rate sort. You deserve everything you're —you're coming in for."

Davenant could only wring the proffered hand wonderingly and continue on his way.

Inside the house Ashley asked only for Drusilla. When she came to the drawing-room he refused to sit down. He explained his hurry on the ground that he was on his way to Boston to take the earliest possible train for New York.

"Oh yes. That's it," he said, in answer to her dumb looks of inquiry. "It couldn't go on, you see. You must have known it—in spite of what you told me last night. You've been an out-and-out good pal. You've cheered me up more than a bit all the time I've been here. If it hadn't been for you—— Oh yes, I'm hit; but not hit so hard that I can't still go on fighting— "

"Not in the Carral country, I hope."

"N-no. On second thoughts that would be only running away. I'm not going to run away. Wounds as bad as mine have healed with a bit of nursing, and—— well, good-bye. Say good-bye to your father and mother for me, will you?—especially to your governor. Rum old chap, but sound—sound as—as Shakespeare and the Bible. Good-bye once more. Meet again some time."

It was at the door, to which she accompanied him, that he said, "By the way, when are you coming home?"

She called all her dignity to her aid in order to reply lightly, "Oh, I don't know. Not for ages and ages. Perhaps not at all. I may stay permanently over here. I don't know."

"Oh, I say——"

"In any case I'm here for the winter."

"Oh, but I say, by Jove! That's for ever. You'll be back before spring?"

She weakened in spite of herself. "I couldn't possibly leave till after Christmas."

"Christmas! It's the end of November now. Well, that's not so bad. Expect to be in Southsea some time early in the new year. See you then."

He had gone down the steps, when he turned again. Drusilla was still standing in the open doorway.

"It's awfully queer, but I feel as if—you'll laugh, I know—but I feel as if I'd been kept from the commission of a crime. Funny, isn't it? Well, I'll be off. See you in Southsea not later than the middle of January. Good-bye again; and don't forget my message to your governor."

XXV

IT was late in the afternoon when Davenant reappeared at Tory Hill, having tramped the streets during most of the time since leaving Ashley in the morning. He was nervous. He was even alarmed. He had little clue to Olivia's judgment on his visit to the Marquise, and he found Ashley's hints mysterious.

It was reassuring, therefore, to have her welcome him, with gentle cordiality, into the little oval sitting-room, where he found her at her desk. She made him take the most comfortable seat, while she herself turned partially round, her arm stretched along the back of her chair. Though the room was growing dim, there was still a crimson light from the sunset.

He plunged at once into the subject that had brought him, explaining the nature of the work her father would be called on to do. It would be easy work, though real

work, just what would be within his powers. There would be difficulties, some arising from the relationship of the Massachusetts Bar to that of Michigan, and others on which he touched more lightly; but he thought they could all be overcome. Even if that proved to be impossible, there were other things he knew of that Mr. Guion could do—things quite in keeping with his dignity.

"I've already talked to papa about it," she said. "He's very grateful—very much touched."

"There's no reason for that. I should like his company. I'm—I'm fond of him."

For a few minutes she seemed to be pondering, absently. "There's something I should like to ask you," she said at last.

"Yes, Miss Guion? What is it?"

"When people have done so much harm as—as we've done, do you think it's right that they should get off scot-free—without punishment?"

"I don't know anything about that, Miss Guion. It seems to me I'm not called upon to know. Where we see things going crooked we must butt in and help to straighten them. Even when we've done that to the best of our powers, I guess there'll still be punishment enough to go round. Outside the law courts, that's something we don't have to look after."

Again she sat silent, watching the shifting splendour of the sunset. He could see her profile set against the deep red glow like an intaglio on sard.

"I wonder," she said, "if you have any idea of the many things you've taught me?"

"I?" He almost jumped from his seat. "You're laughing at me."

"You've taught me," she went on quietly, "how hard and narrow my character has been. You've taught me how foolish a thing pride can be, and how unlovely we can make even that noble thing we call a spirit of independence. You've taught me how big human nature is—how vast and deep and—and *good*. I don't think

I believed in it before. I know I didn't. I thought it was the right thing, the clever thing, to distrust it, to discredit it. I did that. It was because, until I knew you—that is, until I knew you as you *are*—I had no conception of it—not any more than a peasant who's always starved on barren, inland hills has a conception of the sea."

He was uncomfortable. He was afraid. If she continued to speak like that he might say something difficult to withdraw. He fell back awkwardly on the subject of her father and the job at Stoughton.

"And you won't have to worry about him, Miss Guion, when you're over there in England," he said earnestly, as he summed up the advantages he had to offer, "because if he's ill, I'll look after him, and if he's *very* ill, I'll cable. I promise you I will—on my solemn word."

"You won't have to do that," she said simply, "because I'm going too."

Again he almost jumped from his chair. "Going too? Going where?"

"Going to Stoughton with papa."

"But—but—Miss Guion——"

"I'm not going to be married," she continued, in the same even tone. "I thought perhaps Colonel Ashley might have told you. That's all over."

"All over—how?"

"He's been so magnificent—so wonderful. He stood by me during all my trouble, never letting me know that he'd changed in any way——"

"Oh, he's changed, has he?"

Because he sat slightly behind her she missed the thunderous gloom in his face, while she was too intent on what she was saying to note the significance in his tone.

"Perhaps he hasn't changed so much after all. As I think it over I'm inclined to believe that he was in love with Drusilla from the first—only my coming to Southsea brought in a disturbing——"

"Then he's a hound! I'd began to think better of him—I did think better of him—but now, by God, I'll——"

With a backward gesture of the hand, without looking at him, she made him resume the seat from which he was again about to spring.

"No, no. You don't understand. He's been superb, He's still superb. He would never have told me at all if he hadn't seen——"

She stopped with a little gasp.

"Yes? If he hadn't seen—what?"

"That I—that I—I care—for some one else."

"Oh! Well, of course, that does make a difference."

He fell back into the depths of his chair, his fingers drumming on the table beside which he sat. Minutes passed before he spoke again. He got the words out jerkily, huskily, with dry throat—

"Some one—in England?"

"No—here."

During the next few minutes of silence he pulled himself imperceptibly forward, till his elbows rested on his knees, while he peered up into the face of which he could still see nothing but the profile.

"Is he—is he—coming to Stoughton?"

"He's *going* to Stoughton. He's been there—already."

If there was silence again it was because he dared not frame the words that were on his tongue.

"It isn't—it can't be——"

Without moving otherwise she turned her head so that her eyes looked into his obliquely. She nodded. She could utter no more than the briefest syllables. "Yes. It is."

His lips were parched, but he still forced himself to speak. "Is that true?—or are you saying it because—because I put up the money?"

She gathered all her strength together. "If you hadn't put up the money, I might never have known

that it was true; but it *is* true. I think it was true before that—long ago—when you offered me so much—so *much*!—that I didn't know how to take it—and I didn't answer you. I can't tell. I can't tell when it began—but it seems to me very far back——"

Still bending forward, he covered his eyes with his left hand, raising his right in a blind, groping movement in her direction. She took it in both her own, clasping it to her breast, as she went on——

"I see now—yes, I think I see quite clearly—that that's why I struggled against your help, in the first place. . . . If it had been anybody else I should probably have taken it at once. . . You must have thought me very foolish. . . I suppose I was. . . . My only excuse is that it was something like—like revolt—first against the wrong we had been doing, then against the great, sublime thing that was coming up out of the darkness to conquer me. . . That's the way I felt. . . I was afraid. . . . I wanted something smaller—something more conventional—such as I'd been trained for. . . . It was only by degrees that I came to see that there were big things to live for—as well as little. . . It's all so wonderful!—so mysterious! I can't tell! . . . I only know that now——"

He withdrew his hand, looking troubled.

"Are you—are you—*sure?*"

She reflected a minute. "I know what makes you ask that. You think I've changed too suddenly. If so, I can explain it."

The silence in which he waited for her to continue assented in some sort to this reading of his thoughts.

"It isn't that I've changed," she said at last, speaking thoughtfully, "so much as that I've wakened to a sense of what's real for me as distinguished from what's been forced and artificial. You may understand me better if I say that in leading my life up to—up to recently, I've been like a person at a play—a play in which the situations are interesting and the characters sympathetic, but

which becomes like a dream the minute you leave the theatre and go home. I feel that—that with you—I've—I've got home."

He would have said something, but she hurried on.

"I've not changed toward the play, except to recognize the fact that it *was* a play—for me. I knew it the instant I began to learn about papa's troubles. That was like a summons to me, like a call. When it came, everything else—the things I'd been taught to strive for and the people whom I had supposed to be the only ones worth living with grew distant and shadowy, as though they belonged to a picture or a book. It seemed to me that I woke then for the first time to a realization of the life going on about me here in my own country, and to a sense of my share in it. If I hadn't involved myself so much—and involved some one else with me—my duty would have been clearer from the start. But Colonel Ashley's been so noble!—he's understood me so well!—he's helped me so much to understand myself!—that I can't help honouring him, honouring him with my whole heart, even if I see now that I don't—that I never did—care for him in the way——"

She pressed her handkerchief to her lips to keep back what might have become a sob.

"Did you know I—I loved you?" he asked, still speaking hoarsely.

"I thought you must," she said simply. "I used to say I hoped you didn't—but deep down in my heart——"

He got up and strode to the window, where, with his back to her, he stared awhile at the last cold glimmer of the sunset. His big frame and broad shoulders shut out the light to such an extent that when he turned it was toward a darkened room. He could barely see her as she sat sidewise to the desk, an arm along the back of her chair. His attitude bespoke a doubt in his mind that still kept him at a distance.

"You're not—you're *not*—saying all this," he pleaded,

" because you think I've done anything that calls for a reward. I said once that I should never take anything from you, and I never shall—unless it's something you give only because you can't help it."

Her answer was quite prompt. " I'm not giving anything—or doing anything. What has happened seems to me to have come about simply and naturally, like the sunrise or the seasons, because it's the fullness of time and what God means. I can't say more about it than that. If it depended on my own volition I shouldn't be able to speak of it so frankly. But now—if you want me—as you wanted me once——"

She rose and stood by her chair, holding herself proudly and yet with a certain meekness. With his hands clasped behind him, as though even yet he dared not touch her, and head hung in the characteristic manner of a young bull about to charge, he crossed the twilit room towards her.

Late that night Henry Guion stood on the terrace below the Corinthian-columned portico. There was no moon, but the stars had the gold fire with which they shine when the sky is violet. Above the horizon a shimmering halo marked the cluster of cities and towns. In the immediate foreground the great American elm was leafless now, but for that reason more clearly etched against the starlight—line on line, curve on curve, sweeping, drooping, interlaced.

Guion stood with head up and figure erect, as if from strength given back to him. Even through the darkness he displayed some of the self-assurance and stoutness of heart of the man with whom things are going well. He was remembering—questioning—doubting.

" I had come to the end of the end. . . and I prayed . . . yes, I *prayed*. . . I asked for a miracle . . . and the next day it seemed to have been worked. . . Was it the prayer that did it ? . . . Was it anyone's prayer ?

. . . Was it anyone's faith? . . . Was it—God? . . . Had faith and prayer and God anything to do with it? . . . Do things happen by coincidence and chance? . . . or is there a Mind that directs them? . . . I wonder . . . I wonder! . . ."

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